

**LITERACY AND ITS DISCONTENTS:  
MODERNIST ANXIETY AND THE LITERACY FICTION  
OF VIRGINIA WOOLF, E. M. FORSTER,  
D. H. LAWRENCE AND ALDOUS HUXLEY**

A Dissertation

by

NICOLE M. DUPLESSIS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2008

Major Subject: English

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## ABSTRACT

Literacy and Its Discontents: Modernist Anxiety and the Literacy Fiction of Virginia

Woolf, E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley. (August 2008)

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Literacy theory, a multi-disciplinary, late-twentieth century endeavor, examines the acts of reading and writing as cognitive and social processes, seeking to define the relationship between reading and writing and other social and cognitive—especially linguistic—acts. As such, literacy theory intersects with discussions of public and individual education and reading habits that surface with the rise of the mass reading public. This dissertation analyzes scenes of reading and writing in the fiction of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley as implicit authorial discourses on the function of literacy, including properties of written language and the social consequences of literate acts. It argues that reading and writing form important thematic concerns in Modernist fiction, defines fiction that theorizes about reading and writing as “literacy fiction,” and proposes fictional dramatizations of literate activity as subjects for literacy theory.

Chapter I argues that early twentieth-century Britain is an important historical site for intellectual consideration of literacy because near-universal access to education

across social classes influences an increase in middle and working class readers.

Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* provides a test case for the analysis of scenes of reading because her democratic concern with education is well established in the scholarly literature.

Chapter II argues that in "The Celestial Omnibus" and "Other Kingdom," Forster critiques use of literacy as cultural capital. Chapter III argues that Forster's *A Room with a View* and *Howards End* portray the dangers of naïve reading and the difficulties of autodidacticism for the working class, respectively. Chapter IV argues that Lawrence's "Shades of Spring" and *Sons and Lovers* introduce the theoretically unexplored topic of literacy's influence on intimate relationships. Chapter V argues that Huxley's *Brave New World* responds to the Modernist discourse on literacy by addressing the restriction of individual literacy by the State and elite intellectuals. The conclusion summarizes Modernist representation of literacy, states the significance of the methodology and its further applications, and refines the definition of literacy fiction. Because Modernist writers scrutinize the relationship between external forces and the individual psyche, their anxiety-tinged portraits treat both cognitive and social functions of literate acts.

To Anton,

for the late nights of proofreading and listening to paragraphs and sentences,

for the words you provided when I just couldn't think of a word that meant "x,"

for the thousands of things you did to remove every possible obstacle to my writing,

for your encouragement and support,

and the love that you give me always,

because this wouldn't have been possible without you.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Orality-literacy studies have their scholarly origins in the realm of literary studies (specifically classics), in Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* and Milman Parry's earlier work, which sought, among other things, to contextualize the creation of epic poetry within the specific society in which the poetry was created. Many of the foundational theorists of literacy studies, from Marshall McLuhan to Walter Ong and Harvey Graff, locate themselves, their teaching and research, in English departments. However, increasingly the study of orality and (especially) literacy has veered away from literary studies, taking a more social scientific bent, or in English departments, illuminating the study and teaching of composition. Apart from adopting the term "literacy" to describe basic functional knowledge of and ability to navigate processes of information, as in "academic literacy" and "technological literacy," composition theorists work with orality-literacy theory in order to explain and confront various situations in the teaching of composition. From at least the 1980s, theorizing literacy has been considered an essential part of theorizing the teaching of composition, which deals explicitly with literate activity. For two early examples of this, see Jay L. Robinson's "Literacy in the Department of English" (1985), and Joseph Comprone's "An Ongian Perspective on the History of Literacy: Psychological Context and Today's College Student Writer" (1986). Departments of English are in many ways seen as harboring potential solutions to

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This dissertation follows the style of the *MLA Style Manual*.



the “literacy crisis” in U.S. education, as in Christopher Schroeder’s “Rereading the Literacy Crisis of American Colleges and Universities” (2002). More general theoretical approaches to composition studies that use literacy theory as their methodology include M. Jimmie Killingsworth’s “Product and Process, Literacy and Orality: An Essay on Composition and Culture” (1993), Pat Belanoff’s “Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning, and Teaching” (2001), and Joe Nopora’s “Orality and Literacy, Intimacy and Alienation: the Eternal, Internal, Contradictions of Teaching Composition” (2002).

The exception is Early Modern Studies, in which the question of the book and who reads or produces it is central to many scholars’ work.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation seeks to reintegrate literacy and literature across time periods, while focusing on the early twentieth century. I propose that, by examining the ways in which literary texts represent scenes of literate activity, it is possible to increase our understanding of changing trends in literacy, such as the diversification of literacy communities within society, or changing perceptions of the function of reading for the individual, as filtered

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<sup>1</sup> Articles with a general scope include Thomas A. Goodman’s “On Literacy” (1996), published in *Exemplaria*, and Eve Rachele Sanders’s and Margaret W. Ferguson’s “Literacies in Early Modern England” (2002), published in *Critical Survey*. For book-length studies of literacy’s influence on literature’s themes and production during this time, see Eve Rachele Sanders’s *Gender and Literacy on Stage in Early Modern England* (1998), Douglas Brooks’s *From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England* (2000), Ian Frederick Moulton’s *Reading and Literacy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (2004), Heidi Brayman Hackel’s *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (2005), and John S. Pendergast’s *Religion, Allegory, and Literacy in Early Modern England, 1560-1640* (2006). Articles such as Didi-Ionel Cenusser’s “Of Writing and Speaking in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*” (2002) and Jeffrey Masten’s “Pressing Subjects: Or, The Secret Lives of Shakespeare’s Compositors” (1997) demonstrate two important currents in Shakespeare criticism: examination of literate activities as represented in Shakespeare’s plays, and examination of the processes of book-making that enabled the spread of literacy during this period.

through the writers' experiences of the societies in which they lived, including their own socio-political and intellectual biases.

This approach has the potential to expand literary theory as well as literacy theory. Although literature and literacy are intimately connected, with literature *depending* on the fact of literacy in order for the potential of literary texts to be realized, there has long been a disconnect in consideration of these two concepts. While literary representations of literacy hint at an anxiety about this interdependent relationship, literacy theory presupposes the presence (though not necessarily the accessibility) of literature—taken in the broadest sense of “things written.” Literary theory addresses the relationship between readers and texts in various ways. Some currents of theory address ways in which texts represent individuals as socio-political entities, characterizing, defining, and even exploiting those individuals—notably, for example, women—who also serve as potential readers *outside* of the texts. In this construct, readers are placed in a unique position relative to the text by virtue of their existence outside of the text and their fictional representation within it: the reader, a socio-political entity, mirrors the socio-political entity represented within the text. Some versions of reader response theory address actual readers, and narrative theory deals with the reader as constructed by the text, but neither of these categories of theory seeks to account for the presence of reading individuals *within texts*—representations of literate activity—and the relation of these readers or scenes of reading to what historians and literacy-orality theorists have said about literate activity historically or psychologically. Epistemological or psychological studies, which theorize representations of consciousness in texts, can only

be enhanced by theorizing ways of thinking and knowing that are connected with the act of reading, as literacy is a cognitive act in addition to a social act.

The problem of this dissertation is to determine, through textual and rhetorical analysis, the attitudes toward literacy and implicit arguments about literacy made by early twentieth-century authors who include scenes of reading in their fictions, culminating in the identification of literacy fiction as a genre originating in the Modernist period and reaching across traditionally defined genres of fiction, suggesting connections with nonfiction and poetry as well. As the producers of literary texts, writers are often intimately concerned with the education and situation of the reader, to what purpose readers are putting texts, and whether these purposes are consistent with the material the writer is producing. The preoccupation of many writers with their readership leads to the question of whether the fictional scenes imply a critique of historical developments or model exemplary readerships. The answer might mediate between these two possibilities, as the writer attempts to theorize through his or her fiction about the place of the reader within society, or the social, psychological or cognitive function of the act of reading for the individual reader, theorized as an ideal or represented realistically.

Beyond examination of this implicit authorial discourse on the act of reading, this study has the potential to contribute to literacy-orality theory by bridging the gap between theoretical-sociological studies of literacy, which tend either to keep literacy in the theoretical sphere, or else to give it a restrictive definition as a “state of being,” and historical studies of literacy, which are increasingly moving toward identification of

diverse communities of readers, who use different “levels” of literacy—from basic skills such as signing a document to reading to gain in-depth knowledge of one or more subjects—for different purposes. By providing concrete illustrations of various types of reading communities, and illustrating various attitudes toward these communities of readers (held by the author or fictional characters within the work), works of fiction dramatize the social tensions created between and within communities of readers and contribute to a nuanced understanding of literacy as it exists in society.

However, while relevant to society as a whole, literary discussions of literacy have concerns that sociological or historical studies largely lack; literary criticism is necessarily concerned with the case study rather than statistics and social trends. Rather than theorizing masses of readers, many novels or works of short fiction invite the reader to become acquainted with their characters—some of whom engage in acts of reading—as individuals or individual “types.” Thus, the difference between discussing readers in society and within specific cultures and discussing readers in literature is that the reader portrayed within the text is, like the reader outside of the text, an individual reading. Examining readers—even fictional readers—one at a time stresses this individuality, and the individual experience that *is* reading. Thus, this study seeks to resist stereotype, oversimplification, and generalization through the study of particular authors’ representations of particular types of readers in unique situations, in order to move toward a literacy theory of the *individual* rather than the mass and the identification of dramatizations to accompany the abstractions of literacy theory.

## Modernism and Literate Anxiety

Speaking of the early nineteenth century, Richard Altick notes that “educationalists still believed it possible to draw the line between literacy for the sole purpose of learning one’s religious duties and ordained place in life, and learning for undesirable ends.” For example, “[i]f the poor were taught to read only the Bible and related religious material, and if great care were taken not to encourage a taste for entertaining books, there would be no trouble; the nation would enjoy all of the benefits of a literate populace and none of the dangers” (Altick 144). The “dangers” might include the discontent of the populace, which may have been inspired, as in the historical case of Frederick Douglass or the fictional inhabitants of Huxley’s *Brave New World*, by the increase in self-awareness afforded by deep literacy. An additional, useful goal for education of the poor was to increase their productivity, a goal which, as Altick notes, “had no relation whatsoever to the possible cultural improvement of the nation at large or the inner satisfaction of the individual” (143). It is clear that in the 100+ years between the educational reforms Altick mentions and his record of them, the general attitude toward the social and individual uses of literacy have changed to the extent that he assumes that literacy has the potential to affect not only the culture of the nation, but also the “inner satisfaction of the individual,” rather than individual piety, productivity, and preservation of hierarchical social order. Arguably, these changes in attitude were occurring as the Victorian Period ebbed, merged with, and made way for the social changes of the early twentieth century.

While literacy began to be more widely valued, becoming more than a vehicle for communication, yet liberated in large part from the religious connotations previously associated with reading for personal improvement,<sup>2</sup> it still retained some of its elements of anxiety—the anxiety that the masses would become discontented, the anxiety that consumption of literature was counterproductive,<sup>3</sup> the anxiety, prevalent in the novels of Louisa May Alcott as well as Virginia Woolf, that certain literature was dangerous for women in particular.<sup>4</sup> With widespread literacy among all classes, and the increase in type and availability of reading material, literacy also inspired new anxieties with the new century: that the reader would be inadequately prepared for the literary works she or he encountered, and thus would be unable to access these works properly, or to reap the cognitive benefits of reading, particularly of reading certain types of—i.e. *Modernist*—works. Thus, the question of reading becomes bound to the idea of consciousness and how literacy—reading the correct works, for example, in the correct manner—might shape the consciousness of the individual. Further, as reading influences consciousness, writers began to recognize literacy as the key to a fully realized spiritual and philosophic existence, with reading sometimes becoming the focus of democratic impulses by authors otherwise considered elitist; even the basic mental life of an “average”

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<sup>2</sup> As in the case of Medieval monastic reading or the reading of the Bible, Protestant catechetics and religious tracts from the sixteenth century forward.

<sup>3</sup> An attitude associated with the Utilitarians according to Altick (see Ch. 6 of *The English Common Reader*).

<sup>4</sup> In her article “Reading Uncommonly: Virginia Woolf and the Practice of Reading,” Kate Flint discusses the theory that women, “naturally” more susceptible to emotion and identification in reading, risked losing the self through over-identification with characters in novels. In this context, she discusses the radical nature of Woolf’s insistence on the reader’s—particularly the female reader’s—autonomy and the link between reading and individuality (193-196).

individual is considered enhanced by the literate act.<sup>5</sup> Frequently, the text emerges as a vehicle propelling the author and reader toward an aesthetic or intellectual ideal, achieved by means of their shared literacy. Meanwhile, the text that influences the consciousness seeks to represent the consciousness, as occurs most notably in the later novels of Woolf and Joyce. This preoccupation with literacy—a preoccupation revealed by the frequent surfacing of literacy themes and scenes of literate activity that seek to theorize about literate activity—resembles a kind of large-scale intellectual hysteria, or at least a near-obsessive repetition of the motifs of literacy across authors of this time.

Though literacy was more widespread at this period of history than ever before, the manner of education of the masses was some cause for concern for the elite, intellectual producers of literary texts, inspiring, along with anxiety, the desire to aid in the education of this populace—presumably for the benefit of author and reader alike. While literacy, and education more broadly, promised benefits including limited social mobility for members of the middle and lower classes, as late as 1918, there was “no acknowledgement of the need for universal secondary education” among British legislators, and between 1910-1929, only “39 percent of middle class boys went to secondary school, and 8.5 percent went to university” (DeGroot 303). According to David Vincent’s study, “elementary education only became universal in 1870, compulsory in 1880, and free in 1886” (31). The elite schools attended by the upper classes and the more privileged of the middle class did not address English literary

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<sup>5</sup> Consider, for example, Ezra Pound’s (admittedly elitist) primer, *The ABC of Reading* and various nonfiction works by Virginia Woolf, notably “How Should One Read a Book?”

culture or seek to instill a habit of leisure reading in the students.<sup>6</sup> Thus, education among the middle classes in the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century would likely have been less common than in the nineteen-teens and twenties, more variable in its quality and duration (Altick 173), with education in “letters” largely dependant on self-motivation and self-teaching. The response to this deficiency in education among the rising classes of readers (or the readers of the rising classes) was an increase in written materials *about* reading. “[T]he 1920s and the 1930s were flooded with popular books and articles on reading, written for academic and non-academic audiences alike” (61). Melba Cuddy-Keane, in her recent study of Woolf, mentions titles by W. E. Simnett, F. H. Pritchard, Hugh Walpole, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in addition to Woolf herself and her literary contemporaries, who included, among others, Ezra Pound and F. R. Leavis (61). She implies that the attention given to reading is the result of anxiety over its continued relevance, as “this activity around reading . . . speaks more to its threatened survival than to its flourishing life” (Cuddy-Keane 61), an observation that late-twentieth and early twenty-first century literacy theorists might make of their own endeavors. “We can see, then, two separate though related strands in the discussion: promoting serious reading because it is a genuine public need, and defending serious reading because it is a threatened economy” (Cuddy-Keane 63). In the process of promoting and defending, a philosophy of reading emerges—one which privileges the reader in society for a variety of reasons, among which is the fact that a

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<sup>6</sup> See Altick for further discussion of education and the development of leisure reading (175, 179, 183, 187).



well-educated readership would provide an audience for the intellectual works being produced by the writers of treatises on reading.

This study argues for a continuity between Modernist nonfiction works that focus on the act—or the art—of reading and fictional representation of reading, and the consequent emergence of a unique twentieth-century genre: literacy fiction. During the Modernist period, specifically among British authors, who had a traditionally more vexed relationship with universal literacy than their American counterparts, the literacy novel, accompanied by the more limited literacy short story,<sup>7</sup> emerges as a distinct, and distinctly *fictional* genre in which authors, who by birth or through their own educational efforts, had achieved the status of intellectual elite—a status that transcended social class, though many, such as D. H. Lawrence, still retained elements of class identity— theorize about literacy through their representation of literate activity. This genre grows out of the Modernist anxiety concerning the reading of the newly literate or inadequately educated masses, and the discourses of the time that responded to shifting trends in education—including public, private, and self-education.

Modernism's discourse on literacy may be introduced, first of all, by invoking its text- and language-centeredness. One of the self-stated endeavors of Ezra Pound, for example, was to “make [language] new,” in part by “resuscitat[ing] the dead art of

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<sup>7</sup> Literacy fiction is distinct from, though prefaced by, the literacy memoir, a famous American example of which is Frederick Douglass's narrative though the literacy memoir genre had less famous counterparts among the nineteenth-century English working class. Altick devotes a chapter to the “self-made reader,” using memoirs of various working-class autodidacts as his primary sources.

poetry.”<sup>8</sup> Formal experimentation is virtually a cliché of Modernism. In the specific context of Modernism, Gabriele Schwab argues that there is a “relationship between language and subjectivity or, from a slightly different perspective, the capacity of poetic language to generate literary subjectivity” (ix); he further notes that much Modernist literature “explores ever new connections between language and subjectivity and attempts to transgress or expand the boundaries of each” (Schwab 2). Critics whose discussions of Modernism suggest a preoccupation with literacy in various manifestations include Michael Kaufmann, who, referring to the “oddly shaped bodies of twentieth-century texts” (17), writes that modernist works “flaunt their bodies and invite the stares of readers” (14). Jerome McGann, in the context of Modernist experimentation with language, cites their exploration of “the transformational resources of language as a literal event (an event of letters)” (179); his discussion of the use of small presses and artistic formats that stress the “thing-ness” of the book and the language it contained also suggests a deliberate separation of the modernist artistic production from “mass publications”—“popular” literature. In a much earlier critical work, Gabriel Josipovici argues that Modernism countered “[h]abit and laziness, not faulty vision,” and so was “primarily concerned with ways of *reading*” (xvi), suggesting a social critique of modern literacy or popular literacy. Accordingly, Nina Schwartz

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<sup>8</sup> The phrase “make it new” originates from the title of a book of essays published by Pound with Faber (1934) and Yale University Press (1935). This phrase has become closely associated with Pound, but more generally with the Modernist movement as defined by Pound. In his poem “Hugh Selwyn Mauberly,” the title character, “out of key with his time,” counts his attempt to “resuscitate the dead art/ Of poetry” among his failed or now-meaningless poetic endeavors (l. 1-2).

frames the modernist relationship with literacy as a “crisis of literacy” influenced by the rise of a “middle-class, mass reading public with limited interests in high culture” (15).

Literacy theory, specifically as articulated by Marshall McLuhan, aids in our understanding of Modernist experimentation by suggesting the level of constraint Modernist writers felt while attempting to fulfill their artistic ideals using written media. McLuhan proposes “consciousness” as an alternative to “the lineal structuring of rational life by phonetic literacy [that] has involved us in an interlocking set of consistencies.” He says that “consciousness is regarded as the mark of a rational being, yet there is nothing lineal or sequential about the total field of awareness that exists in any moment of consciousness. Consciousness is not a verbal process” (*UM* 85). Although Modernists such as Woolf and Joyce had to rely on phonetic literacy to express consciousness, which they represented as verbal, they move away from the “lineal” and “sequential” in order to do so. McLuhan’s observation about consciousness as an alternative to traditional, linear rationality points to the writing techniques of the Modernists, who challenged the boundaries of the printed word in order to represent consciousness more effectively, or to challenge the static nature of received knowledge in the modern world. McLuhan’s privileging of “Chinese nonphonetic scripts” as retaining “a rich store of inclusive perception in depth of experience that tends to become eroded in civilized cultures of the phonetic alphabet” (*UM* 84) suggests the influence on McLuhan of the writings of Ezra Pound, and indicates a strong tie between literacy theory and Modernist writing.

While McLuhan's literacy theories align him with Modernist endeavors, making him seem—in his early work, at least—a kind of “late Modernist,” the explanatory power of literacy theory for Modernism extends beyond the writing of a single theorist. Modernist writers were preoccupied with text and consciousness; likewise, literacy theory is preoccupied with text and consciousness, and the interplay between the two. Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* functions as a primer of early literacy theory, encapsulating most of the basic theories about literacy in terms of their evolution within societies as those societies develop and then internalize literacy and the further developments—such as systems of classification of knowledge—possible in societies that have internalized literacy. While Ong focuses on societal observations rather than individual literacy, the idea of “interiorizing” literacy is useful for theorizing about characters within Modernist fictions of literacy. A character's acquisition of literacy, or of an advanced degree of literacy, can be discussed in terms of the “interiorization” of literacy, as the character, who exists within a literate society and therefore can not be considered untouched by literacy, nevertheless is perceived by the reader or other characters within the fiction as being imperfectly or inadequately literate in some way. Forster, Lawrence and Huxley each provide examples of characters who have not fully “interiorized” literacy—characters who strive for or encounter “deeper” versions of literacy or whose literacy is perceived by the reader or by characters within the work as faulty. Ong's discussion of the interiorization, on a societal level, of literacy—derived from Havelock's discussion of ancient Greek society, which “interiorized” writing at around the time of Plato “enough to affect thought processes

generally” (Ong 94)—does not imply literacy’s superiority to orality; the mark for Ong of “interiorization” is that the society comes to regard writing as having authority superior to spoken words (Ong 96). However, the representation of individual literacy and uses of literacy in fictional texts from this time period do carry value judgments consistent with the discourse on literacy during the early twentieth century and with the very thorough interiorization of literacy in Western culture by the end of the nineteenth century.

Ong explains the idea that “primarily oral” and “literate” cultures have different ways of accessing knowledge, and that in a culture’s movement from “primary orality” to literacy, there is, on some level, an exchange between different ways of knowing and different ways of processing and formulating information about the world. However, Ong is not alone in outlining the basic differences between spoken and written language. In fact, linguistic differences between speech and writing have been acknowledged by numerous scholars and supported by empirical and theoretical studies, so that this fact is almost universally recognized, though studies of qualitative differences between speech and writing continue. The differences between speech and writing resonate with cultural connotations; for example, “[o]ral communication unites people in groups” while “[w]riting and reading are solitary occupations that throw the psyche back on itself” (Ong 69). “Orality” is associated with communal, tribal, or clan-based societies while “literacy” defines society according to solitary individuals reading. Thus, in fiction, when the act of reading is portrayed in a way that stresses the separateness of an individual by virtue of his or her literacy, this portrayal is consistent with how theories

of literacy define the literate act. The work of fiction may further speculate on why reading separates the individual from society or the mass.

The structural differences between speech and writing that Khosrow Jahandarie outlines in *Spoken and Written Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* have parallels in Ong's discussion of the "psychodynamics of orality"; Jahandarie's presentation of these structural differences suggests similarities between structures of language and structures of thought, as Ong also proposes. One of the divergent characteristics of writing, the text's permanence as contrasted to the "evanescence" of spoken language (Jahandarie 134-136) connects with Ong's theory of textuality, as "[t]exts are thing-like, immobilized in visual space, subject to what Goody calls 'backward-scanning'" (Ong 100). Because of this quality of relative permanence, texts may be subjected to analysis in ways that spoken language cannot. When a Modernist author calls attention to the fact that the reader is engaged in the act of reading, inviting the reader, for example, to scan a passage he or she has just read and calling attention to the fact that the characters can not do so, this is a self-reflexive literate act—even meta- or hyper-literate—and stresses the epistemological function of literacy.

The "thing-like" permanence of a text is important to both Ong's and Jahandarie's discussions of the consequences of literacy, though Jahandarie stresses the "aura of sanctity" surrounding a text (135) while Ong stresses the separateness of the text from the individual who produces it, and the separateness of that individual from others, whether readers or other members of the society/community in which the text is produced. "By separating the knower from the known (Havelock 1963), writing makes

it possible increasingly to articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as never before not only to the external objective world quite distinct from itself but also to the interior self against whom the objective world is set” (Ong 105). It is precisely this openness of the psyche to the external world—the engagement of the self with the external world—that concerns early twentieth-century writers above all other questions.<sup>9</sup> Modernist writers’ association between the openness of the psyche and reliance on or use of written media is evident from the close connection between psychological development and use of written media in many Modernist fictions. The psychological implications of Modernist portrayals of literacy are numerous. For example, the use of written media as a means to self-knowledge and mental development becomes central in E. M. Forster’s works; in particular, *A Room with a View* makes explicit connections between Lucy’s use of the *Baedeker* and her self-consciousness, worldview, interaction with others, and even competence to live her life. In a novel that is explicitly concerned—even in the workings of the stream-of-consciousness narration—with consciousness, Woolf’s *Clarissa Dalloway* allows her mind to obsess over written words that she encounters because their fixity permits fixation. In the same work, Septimus Smith regards his writing as an extension of his own psyche—one that may be discovered and possessed

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<sup>9</sup> Freud’s model of psychology, which greatly influenced Modernist conceptions of the mind, was in itself writing-centered. For example, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the subject of analysis is often the precise language in which the dreams are written, with the dreams themselves being secondary. The very fact that the dreams were written down before details were forgotten allows for their analysis—in effect, an “opening of the psyche.” Thus, psychoanalysis, the basis for much of the Modernist writers’ experimentation with written representation of thought processes, is made possible by the full interiorization of literacy. Psychoanalysis as a literate act made possible by the interiorization of literacy is not explicitly mentioned by Ong, but follows logically from Ong’s assertions about the influence of literate activity on the psyche.

because of its separateness from his body and its exterior position in relation to the self, in spite of its intimate function—containment of his thoughts and feelings.<sup>10</sup>

David Olson, writing from the perspective of cognitive psychology, “argue[s] that writing adds a new type of structure to the world and in coming to use that structure, that is, in reading and writing, learners learn something that we have by and large overlooked” (Olson “Writing” 107). While this seems to suggest the same idea as Ong’s assertion that “writing restructures thought,” Olson argues for this change on an individual level, as each individual acquires literacy, rather than on a societal/cultural level; indeed, he suggests in his essay “Writing and the Mind” and throughout *The World on Paper* that children’s experience of acquiring literacy is analogous to, if qualitatively different from, the change in consciousness experienced by the “inventors of writing systems” (Olson “Writing” 108). Rejecting the idea that writing transcribes speech, Olson claims, rather, that writing gives new form to language (“Writing” 108), which leads him to re-conceptualize “the relationship between writing and cognition” (WP 64) based, in part, on an analysis of how awareness of language is influenced by knowledge and use of scripts (WP 85). Olson’s theories are significant to this study because he theorizes the influence of writing and the leap in consciousness from non-literacy to literacy on subjectivity, defined as “the *recognition* that what is in the mind is in the mind” (WP 234, emphasis in original).

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Septimus’s attitude towards his own writing to McLuhan’s treatment of communications technology as “extensions of man,” and to Freud’s discussion of technology as a “prosthesis” in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.



Another useful element in Olson's text is his discussion of the differences in the ways Jewish tradition and Christianity viewed the interpretation of text, with Jewish practices allowing for more freedom of interpretation (*WP* 147). He compares the categories of interpretation according to Judaic tradition and Christianity as represented by Dante. "The four levels were made memorable in the Jewish tradition by the acronym 'PRDS,' pronounced 'Pardes,' which stood for the four forms of meaning: P for plain sense, R for oblique meaning, D for homiletic, and S for mystical meaning" (*WP* 147). Dante's scheme involves looking at "the letter alone," interpreting allegorically, morally, or anagogically (Alighieri qtd. in *WP* 147-148). Such a system of interpretation is useful in categorizing uses of texts in works such as *Brave New World*, in which a particular way of reading a text (an unguided method) influences consciousness and provides context for interaction between the "savage" character, raised in a culture that blends Judeo-Christian and animist religious elements, and "civilized" citizens of the World State.

Because literacy theory provides an alternate vocabulary to discuss the methods of the Modernists, reading Modernist texts through the lens of literacy theory will contribute to our overall understanding of Modernist literature, and, as this dissertation argues, provide links between the anxieties that inspired experimental texts and the literacy-themed subject matter—dramatizations of literacy's uses and literacy's effect on consciousness and social mobility—of less experimental Modernists.

### Virginia Woolf and Theories of Modernist Literacy

In many ways a quintessential Modernist writer of fiction, Virginia Woolf in particular has been the focus of much criticism because of her concern with the reader (especially the female reader) and the practices of reading and writing. This concern has made her the subject not only of literary critics, but also of scholars working in the field of composition studies because of the pedagogical dimensions of *A Room of One's Own* and *The Common Reader* and shorter essays and lectures such as “How Should One Read a Book?” The scholarship ranges from ways of using Woolf’s writing in the composition classroom, to appreciation of her portrayal of readers informed by her theories of reading as expressed in her nonfiction, accounts that use Woolf’s sexual metaphors or evolution as a means of understanding her particular conceptions of the author-reader relationship in her fiction and nonfiction, and those that seek almost a neo-reader-response theory by way of Woolf’s writings.

The 1994 Conference on Virginia Woolf at Bard College implicitly recognized the changing ways in which Woolf’s writings are used and taught in the classroom with the theme for the 4<sup>th</sup> annual conference, which became the title of their proceedings, *Re: Reading, Re: Writing, Re: Teaching Virginia Woolf*. Included under the theme of “Re: Teaching Woolf,” Robert Miltner’s essay addresses the problems undergraduates face when confronted with a text like *The Waves*, which demands the use of “active reading techniques and active writing techniques” (45). While his focus is on the use of creative writing to facilitate understanding of difficult texts, this strategy of active engagement with texts is a pedagogical variation of Woolf’s own advice to readers, albeit more

prescriptive. James L. Hoban describes *A Room of One's Own* as “a text about rhetoric,” one which “adds to a new view of rhetoric by eliminating anything that smacks of a system such as the rigid ordering of topics so prized by the ancients and their followers, and offering as an alternative an approach at once individualistic and suggestive, one appealing, at least initially, to the daughters of educated men” (149, 151). Though Hoban’s essay does not treat pedagogy directly, his thesis—Woolf’s reinvention of rhetoric—demonstrates Woolf’s own pedagogical intentions and suggests the pedagogical applications of *A Room of One's Own* to encourage “women as rhetors. . . to find a place where they are freed from the distracting and censorious gaze of men,” rhetorically as well as spatially and economically (152). In their description of their purpose in “A Workshop in Writing to Read Virginia Woolf” given at the conference, Susan Kirschner and Paul Connolly describe their inquiry into techniques of active reading that “listen closely to the questions” asked by a given text, and their use of McLuhan’s *Laws of Media* (1988), published posthumously by Eric McLuhan (251-252). They discuss how the composition of discussion questions can make or mar class discussion by closing it too soon, presumably failing to let the text’s own questions surface (253-254). The purpose of their experimental presentation was to “preserve the spirit, as well as the letter, of her work” (257) by approximating the active reading Woolf condones in “How to Read a Text” through clever facilitation of classroom discussion. While other papers in the collection also focus on Woolf’s works in the classroom, these essays from *Re: Reading, Re: Writing, Re: Teaching Virginia Woolf* share with each other and my study a recognition of Woolf’s own advice to the reader,

and the strategies of reading she requires of the reader of her fiction, strategies she may have been trying to foster in her readers through her fiction.

While the essays in *Re: Reading, Re: Writing, Re: Teaching Virginia Woolf* approach the themes of reading and writing in Woolf's fiction and how these themes may be presented in the classroom or used to facilitate classroom interaction, the context in which they were delivered and published situates them firmly within Virginia Woolf literacy studies. Deborah Anne Dooley takes a different approach as she treats Woolf's understanding of the literate act in *Plain and Ordinary Things: Reading Women in the Writing Classroom* (1995). Dooley links her interest in feminist theory and women's adoption of the personal narrative form to her experiences teaching writing, placing emphasis on journal writing. In her discussion of the residual orality of women's narrative, she refers to the orality-literacy theory of Walter Ong and Lord's and Parry's work on oral-formulaic poetry. In particular, she reads Woolf's *Between the Acts* as "the fictional expression of the theory of orality proposed by Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy*" (Dooley xvii). Dooley's devotion to the teaching of writing is clear; she links each chapter to practical pedagogical application in her chapter conclusions (xx). She also makes frequent use of Virginia Woolf's writing, calling Woolf a "touchstone" for the book (xxi).

One of the most interesting contributions that Dooley makes in her treatment of Woolf is to describe Woolf's regard for writing as a path to knowledge, especially self-knowledge. As a bridge between *The Waves* and *Moments of Being*, Dooley notes that "Woolf's own intuition is that while the object itself may be lost to us, writing is a

means to recover our relation to it” (24). Writing is also the path to knowledge, as, in Dooley’s interpretation, Woolf provides for the writing instructor and the student a motivation to write—writing to compose the self, both by writing the self and so reproducing the self, and also by lending composure to the self (31). Dooley notes the ways in which Woolf participates in an oral culture by reproducing it in print (55); I would propose that it is because of Woolf’s awareness of written language and its difference from language spoken and thoughts in the mind that Woolf produces her most successful experimental fiction. Thus, while Dooley examines Woolf’s writing in an attempt to reclaim the *oral* quality of women’s *written* narrative, this study seeks to emphasize writers’ awareness of the qualities of written language and their affect on the human condition, especially as experienced by individuals. Nevertheless, critics like Dooley who acknowledge Woolf’s belief in the power of writing—one of two primary literate acts—may contribute to our understanding of how writing is portrayed in Woolf’s fiction, particularly *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Rather than discussing use of Woolf’s writing in the classroom, Vara Neverow discusses “Reading *A Room of One’s Own* as a Model of Composition Theory,” transforming Woolf’s treatise on women in the writing profession into a “student-centered approach to composition theory” by substituting the word “student” for the word “woman” (58). This approach recognizes the empowerment inherent in the act of writing while broadening Woolf’s original application, which is necessarily removed from its original social and historical context. Neverow describes Woolf’s awareness of the literate act of composition in terms of contemporary composition theory, citing “the

narrator's discussion of writing as process and product" (59) in *A Room of One's Own*, for example. While her decontextualization of *A Room of One's Own* and assertion that all students are as "vulnerable" and "disempowered" as women writers in the early decades of the twentieth century are suspect (59), Neverow nevertheless recognizes the importance that Woolf places on the literate act, attention to the act of writing that carries over into her fiction. According to Neverow, "Woolf suggests that really interesting writing is about violating conventions (within reason) to create excitement and empowerment through experimentation and self-exploration" (61). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, Woolf dramatizes a vulnerability enhanced by the act of writing, not disguised or cured by it, as in Neverow's reading of *A Room of One's Own*.

In "A History of the Precedent: Rhetorics of Legitimation in Women's Writing," Catherine Gallagher discusses *A Room of One's Own* as a work in which "a woman writer uses precedents not with the traditionalist aim of normalizing her discourse, of authorizing it from the top of a genealogical or social hierarchy, and certainly not in the traditionalist mode of pointing out earlier mistakes, but in a different spirit, of which we are the immediate inheritors" (323). She thus situates Woolf's work as a turning point in the history of women's rhetoric, the point at which women writers find legitimation through a charisma that is non-authoritarian (324-325). Like Dooley, and, to a lesser degree, Neverow, Gallagher finds in Woolf an affirmation of the power of literate activity; the act of writing—of engaging in written rhetoric—is the transformative act which enables women to find legitimation and create a unique form of authority. Gallagher concludes that,

The effective person constructed in feminist rhetoric was often not an abstract, formal entity, but instead a member of a saving remnant, one specially touched by grace and brought into a community with a mission. Twentieth-century feminism has been—to repeat Weber’s language—“the transformation of charisma in an anti-authoritarian direction.” (326)

She uses *A Room of One’s Own* as an example of both the creation of the “effective person” of feminist rhetoric and anti-authoritarian charisma. Woolf’s writing, which, significantly, centers on the act of writing—of *women* writing, and of what is necessary to facilitate women’s writing—both creates the “effective person” of feminist rhetoric, and, through the creation of distinctly *feminist* rhetoric, transforms traditional rhetoric. Gallagher’s article, then, is further testimony to Woolf’s regard for the power of literacy, although Gallagher herself laments the “routinization of feminism” through academic writing (327).

The most relevant critical work for this study is *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*, which, while grounded in pedagogical theory, also contextualizes itself within Modernist studies and provides a new-historicist approach to the debate concerning education. Melba Cuddy-Keane writes in her introduction that

Between 1904 and her death in 1941, [Woolf] published over five-hundred essays and reviews in more than forty periodicals and two volumes of collected

essays. These writings offer a magnificent compendium of literary opinions and judgments, but they go further to scrutinize the process of reading, to locate reading in a context of historically and ideologically variable standards, and to outline a model for active, self-reflexive reading practices. (1)

This work sets the tone for other criticism seeking to tie literacy theory to Modernist writers' conceptions and portrayals of the acts of reading and writing by taking as its subject a "pedagogical Woolf" concerned about making highbrow intellectual culture available to all" (Cuddy-Keane 2). Seeking to remove Woolf from the strictly "feminist" and "Modernist" spheres, she recontextualizes Woolf as democratic, "uniting the highbrow values of intellectual life with a broad public base" (1). She defines Woolf's relationship to the Modernist concerns with the increasing size of the reading public, and further contextualizes Woolf within the discourse of the "brows," "high," "middle," and "low," with particular reference to "a clash between J. B. Priestley and Harold Nicolson in a series of talks on the BBC under the general title, 'To an Unnamed Listener'" and Woolf's own response, "Middlebrow" (16).

Cuddy-Keane addresses the relationship between readers and their books, situating Woolf in relation to the issue of reading in the early twentieth century. She indicates that "the crisis of general literacy has been generally understood as a key social issue of the nineteenth century," and explains how, when near-universal functional literacy had been achieved by the nineteenth century, "*cultural* literacy then became the immediate goal" (59-60). This crisis of reading resulted in the publication of various



treatises on reading (61), intended to supplement the elementary education of the newly literate classes. Simultaneously, the reader-turned-university-student was being trained for “efficiency and assertiveness, ordered to serve under the banner of legitimacy and competitiveness” and so “was losing the natural appetite and close intimacy with books that, for Woolf, formed the essence of the reading experience” (81). Thus, the writer begins to theorize a different reader, the “new student of adult education” epitomized by a character like E. M. Forster’s Leonard Bast, who nevertheless did not attend formal classes such as those offered by the Working Men’s College, at which Forster taught, or Septimus Smith, who in fact attends Morley, where Virginia Woolf was a teacher from 1905-1907 (81-82).

Cuddy-Keane’s most significant contribution to the study of Woolf’s writing is her discussion of the implied pedagogy of reading found in Woolf’s fiction and nonfiction. This pedagogy as defined by Cuddy-Keane provides a point of entry into reading for the working class, but also modeled a way of reading for the “professional and academic classes” (118). “Most crucially, as representative of a kind of reading rather than a defined segment of the reading public, the identity of Woolf’s common reader is self-selected, and therefore potentially open to all” (117-118). Particularly interesting is Cuddy-Keane’s analysis of the unconscious process of reading in Woolf’s writing, particularly in “How Should One Read a Book?”: “Unconscious response is first, followed by conscious articulation; the unconscious feels, while the conscious judges; the unconscious surrenders, while the conscious distances” (124). For Cuddy-Keane, the unconscious is an “active and creative participant” in the reading process

(124-135), which itself fluctuates between active and creative and passive, withholding judgment when necessary, but actively engaging with the text in order to negotiate the text's meaning, joining with the author in what is, for Woolf, a creative act.

While Woolf does treat literate acts as liberating in her nonfiction, her fiction displays the literate anxiety that underlies the debates on education in which she was engaged, the same anxiety which permeates the texts by the other authors in this study. In *Mrs. Dalloway* in particular, Woolf treats some of the reasons literate activity may be cause for worry:

- Writing, once written and removed from the context in which it is produced, may be misunderstood;
- Writing can not always answer the questions we form about its meaning;
- Writing exposes the psyche to scrutiny from the outside, placing the writer in a position of vulnerability.

A brief consideration of the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* reveals the extent to which they are influenced—indeed, preoccupied—with literate acts: the relationship between Sally Seton and Clarissa Dalloway was cemented by the exchange of books and ideas gained through books, while the relationship between Clarissa and Richard is represented by the image of Clarissa reading alone in bed rather than sleeping with her husband. Clarissa puzzles over a note concerning her husband, debates whether to pick up a book for an acquaintance and whether the book is the “right” book. Peter is defined not by his

literate activity, but by his impotence, which extends to his writing life—he is always composing text in his head that is never realized, just as he is always planning for events that never occur, such as his marriage to Clarissa or his upcoming marriage. Miss Kilman’s religion is signified by her prayer-book; as she is bookish, so is her spirituality. Beyond Clarissa’s circle, the profusion of thoughts that result from Septimus Smith’s shell-shock are mirrored by his profuse writing. Before the war, he aspired to “better himself” by studying Shakespeare. He shares with Peter a kind of literary impotence in his inability to finish his studies because of the disruption of war.

Early in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf portrays a scene of reading that is shaped by technology and embodies Modernist fragmentation. In this scene, the people on the street, who encompass all of the strata of society, gaze into the sky and attempt to spell out—and, by identifying the letters, to read—the message (an advertisement) being written by the “aeroplane” overhead:

Suddenly Mrs. Coates looked up into the sky. The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky! Every one looked up. (Woolf 20)

When the aeroplane surfaces, it not only emits a sound without meaning, but through the sound commits an act of violence, “boring” into the ears of the crowd “ominously,” as aeroplanes had recently been used as the instruments of war, and excited fear and dread.

Here, however, the aeroplane becomes transformed from an object of dread to wonder, because, rather than destroying, as the crowd no doubt expects, it creates—specifically, it communicates and hence creates meaning. However, this technology provides imperfect communication, at best. Woolf describes the process of skywriting, and the resulting confusion, over the next several pages:

Dropping dead down the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose, and whatever it did, wherever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters.  
(20)

In this description, writing is clearly shown to be an active process, which is in keeping with Woolf's theories, expressed in her nonfiction, and critics' interpretations, of the liberating potential of writing. The profusion of smoke that results from the motion of the aeroplane—the writing process, if you will—is pretty, “curled and wreathed,” but meaningless in itself. Because of the feeling of abundance of the “thick ruffled bar,” which is incomprehensible on its own and remains incomprehensible after the letters are fully formed, the sky-writing suggests the profusion of writing that proceeds from the frenetic activity of Septimus Smith's confused mind: “The table drawer was full of those writings; about war; about Shakespeare; about great discoveries; about how there is no death” (140). Like Septimus's ramblings, the words in the sky—insubstantial as smoke—are also incomprehensible, when taken either as part or whole:

But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, and E, a Y perhaps? (20)

This scene of reading, related through the consciousness of one or more of the viewers, suggests not so much written as oral language, or a strange melding of the two. It also lends itself particularly well to interpretation through the lens of literacy theory. All major literacy theorists identify basic characteristics of written and spoken language. Jahandierie in particular compiles the dichotomous properties associated with writing and speech, among which is the assertion that spoken language is ephemeral while written language has a quality of permanence. Indeed, this permanence is the reason written language is able to be subjected to “backward scanning,” thus forming, according to Ong in particular, the foundation for the thought systems of literate cultures. Further, it is when words are written rather than when they are spoken that one becomes conscious of their individual parts, in this case, the individual letters rather than sounds. Nevertheless, the sky-writing, though it is *writing*, shares with speech its ephemeral quality rather than the relative permanence of written language. The present method, isolation and analysis of scenes of literate activity, encourages the reader to think differently about the sky-writing, considering it as its own medium rather than focusing on the reaction of the crowd. The sky-writing itself, while a literate product, is also the

product of what might, in a post-environmentalist world, be considered pollution. However, for Woolf it must have seemed like a “natural” by-product of modern technology—the same technology that demonstrated its ability to destroy in the first large-scale, technologically-assisted war. It is by virtue of this new technology, then, that language becomes warped and unpredictable, and that written language loses its permanence—a quality it is almost universally assumed to possess. The aeroplane, then, a technology that facilitated violence against humans, here commits a violent act towards language, or at least towards the communicative potential of language. It is, of course, in keeping with Modernist philosophies, especially those of the interwar period, that modern technology should be the means of creating fragmentation, destroying meaning and dehumanizing individuals like Septimus.

The fact that the meaning of the skywriting is filtered through the consciousness of each of the observers—here, *readers*—is similarly appropriate for a Modernist writer such as Woolf, as theories of individual consciousness shaped the very genres Modernist writers employed. Further, this scene dramatizes in an ironic manner Woolf’s own theory that reading is a collaborative activity in which meaning is created as the consciousness of the reader joins with the words of the author. The reader is an active rather than passive participant in this process, though, like the writing process itself, this scene emphasizes, rather than the possibility of creating meaning, the impossibility in the face of modern technology. Hence, in their individualized attempts to read the skywriting, Mrs. Coates reads the letters as “Glaxo”; Mrs. Bletchley reads “Kreemo”; Mr. Bowley, “toffee” (20-21). In a further display of irony, Septimus’s thoughts most

clearly represent the problem of the skywriting when he thinks to himself that someone is signaling to him, but “[n]ot indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet” (21). Rather than try to read what he knows he can not yet understand (because, as he says, the message is not yet expressed in actual words), Septimus’s mind, fragmented like the writing, reflects on the writing, its

beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! (22)

It is the damaged consciousness that finds aesthetic significance in the fractured words, mainly by failing or refusing to try to form them into meaning. In Septimus’s war-tattered perception, as in the final description of the sky-writing, the aeroplane becomes not an instrument of war, but an instrument of beauty as it “sped of its own free will” while “curving up and up, straight up, like something mounting in ecstasy, in pure delight, out from behind poured white smoke looping” (28-29). However, unlike most written language, in order to appreciate the beauty of the writing, one must not try to decipher its meaning (or mourn its loss).

In this attention to the act of reading we see evidence of the Modernist preoccupation with literacy. That the letters are shown being processed—and processed

differently—by different individuals’ consciousnesses is appropriate to the Modernist aesthetic and philosophy. Similarly appropriate to the Modernist worldview is the failure of the letters to form any coherent whole, as the necessary pieces are absent or confused, having literally evaporated due to their insubstantial nature—a change in writing wrought by the advent of modern technology. That the act being fragmented is an act of reading suggests Pound’s and Eliot’s complaints about the loss and disruption of Classical learning rather than Woolf’s own optimism about the reading abilities of the ordinary individual. Furthermore, the literate activity of writing has been mediated by modern technology—a technology most recently used for war because of its destructive potential. If the typewriter and printing press facilitate mass production of writing, and if the typewriter in particular further facilitated Modernism’s own experimental aesthetic,<sup>11</sup> this technology of war—the “aeroplane”—shown to be a dehumanizing technology in the Great War, and one that might be seen as contributing to a disembodiment of the individual<sup>12</sup>—effectively prevents the common individual from connecting to the written word, as war and Modern life have prevented Septimus and Peter from connecting with others and have contributed to their own failed literate endeavors. The scene of reading that begins *Mrs. Dalloway* may thus be read allegorically as a statement of the position of the modern common reader, who is alienated from letters, or from what it has traditionally meant to be “lettered.” As a scene of literate activity, the scene may productively be read independent of its function

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the influence of the typewriter on Modernism’s aesthetic, see Kenner’s *The Mechanic Muse*.

<sup>12</sup> See Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*.



as an introductory scene in the novel. The scene of reading may tie into a larger theme in the novel, linking with other scenes of reading, or may operate independently from (though perhaps in complement to) the novel's major themes. Even taken as isolated scenes, however, scenes of literate activity complement literacy theory, theorizing about and illustrating theories of literacy.

Virginia Woolf's preoccupation with the processes of reading and writing is well documented in criticism and plainly evidenced by her nonfiction writing. Appropriately, then, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel that contains multiple scenes of literate activity and in which the scenes of literate activity may be shown to connect to an overall thematic structure, though the theme is not making a point about literacy, *per se*. Other scenes that may be evaluated, in tandem or alone, in terms of how they dramatize features of literate activity, particularly the cognitive and social aspects of literate activity, and the tendency to impose features of literate activity on things other than books and writing (that is, the power of literacy to shape the way in which literate individuals interpret experience) occur

- when, upon returning home from the flower shop, Clarissa encounters the note on the telephone pad inviting her husband to lunch with Lady Bruton (29-30),
- when Clarissa recounts her reading habits and preference for books as companions in bed (31),

- when Clarissa remembers the books that Sally Seton gave to her when they were young, and the ideas and activities, such as writing poetry, that reading inspired (33, 75, 77),
- when Peter ponders the relationship between books and civilization, and reads the faces of “[b]oys in uniform. . . like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England” (50-51),
- when Peter refers to his inability to write or to finish his book (57, 187), but communicates through notes and letters (40, 63-64, 72, 80, 154-155, 159),
- when Septimus makes Lucrezia “write things down” or when he writes (67, 92),
- when Peter considers the changes in newspapers in 5 years’ time (71),
- when Hugh Whitbread is described as having “read nothing, thought nothing, felt nothing” and his education is blamed for his blandness (73), though he is defined according to his letters (173),
- when the narrative shifts to an account of Septimus’s education and the way reading shaped his understanding of England and the war, and life after the war (84-86, 88),
- when the narrative reveals Sir William Bradshaw’s regard for books (or lack thereof) and prescription of rest without books (97, 99),
- when Hugh Whitbread and Richard Dalloway dine with Lady Bruton so that she may enlist their help with writing a letter to the *Times*, which she feels, by virtue of her gender, ill qualified to do (105-111, 119, 180),

- when the narrative reveals the motivations behind and fruits of Miss Kilman's reading, or the question of reading and conversion, which was a feature of Clarissa's relationship with Sally Seton as well (123-125, 126, 130, 137),
- when Rezia ponders the physical reality of Septimus's writing, and when that writing's physicality is revealed as a source of vulnerability (140, 147-148)
- when Septimus reads various media that arrive at his home (144, 145), and
- when Peter is described as "bookish," is shown reading or contemplating reading, and voices his intention to write books (156-157, 167).

Literate activities both influence and reveal the workings of individual consciousnesses in *Mrs. Dalloway*, contributing to a greater understanding of the characters themselves. However, the reader can also extrapolate about the importance of literate activity to the development of the individual and the dangers it poses to the individual psyche.

## Overview

This study examines the works of three Modernist writers, E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, and Aldous Huxley, against the backdrop of Virginia Woolf, whose fiction—particularly *Mrs. Dalloway*, the very type of the Modernist "literacy novel"—presents a different view of literacy from the hopeful tenor of her nonfiction. While these authors' works are equally concerned with the social and cognitive effects of literacy, they have not received the attention that Woolf's work has, perhaps because of Woolf's attention to literacy in her nonfiction, or because her works connect neatly to questions of

feminism and female education. In examining each author's representations of literate activity, I will

- determine each author's level of awareness of the characteristics of literate materials as outlined by Ong and other literacy theorists,
- consider the role of literacy in the socio-economic, psychological and intellectual lives of individuals according to writers in the mainstream and on the "fringe" of British Modernism, and
- draw conclusions about each author's particular "vision" of literacy, including the variety of experience associated with literacy, the properties of literacy, and the outlook of the author (positive or negative, hopeful, optimistic, or pessimistic) regarding literacy.

While it is not possible to demonstrate uniformity of vision among Modernists regarding the effects of literacy, there are similarities that point to the value—and perhaps danger—that these authors find in literacy for the individual, for society as a whole, and perhaps, ultimately, for themselves. That such different authors within the same time period and literary movement focus so emphatically on literate activities, their consequences and dangers suggests an anxiety about literacy among the cultural elite—even cultural elite of different socio-economic backgrounds. My examination of fiction by E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, and Aldous Huxley, in comparison with trends in Virginia Woolf scholarship also moves toward defining the Modernist genre of "literacy

fiction”—fiction that expresses Modernist literacy anxiety and guides the reader towards “correct” perceptions of literacy. My reading of an introductory scene of literate activity in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* serves as a model for my analyses of Forster, Lawrence, and Huxley.

Chapters II and III examine scenes of literate activity in E. M. Forster’s short fiction and novels, respectively. In Forster’s fiction, as in the works of Virginia Woolf, reading and writing are pervasive subjects, almost a preoccupation. Chapter II focuses specifically on two of Forster’s short stories, or, as he terms them, “fantasies,” “The Celestial Omnibus” and “Other Kingdom.” Though largely rooted in the world of realism, both stories contain strong elements of fantasy, almost an anticipation of magical realism. In both cases, moreover, the element of fantasy is closely tied to the act of reading, which is portrayed as a transcendent or transformative act. In “The Celestial Omnibus,” Forster uses allegory to suggest a way of reading that privileges innocence over received literary wisdom. In doing so, Forster challenges the acquisition of literary “taste,” replacing it with a more Romantic notion: that readers should approach literary texts in an unbiased manner, allowing feeling and spontaneity to dictate one’s regard for literary work rather than preconceived ideas, and allowing for a personalized reading experience. In overturning literary “taste,” Forster is providing for a liberation of literacy and literature from the system of “academic capital” discussed by Pierre Bourdieu, which theorizes the link between “intellectualization” of literacy and the class system, making “correct” literary knowledge the key to social advancement. As a “literacy fiction,” “The Celestial Omnibus” demonstrates essential elements of

Modernist “literate anxiety”: concern that literacy, if regarded at all, will devolve into a mere social tool for the advancement of the bourgeoisie, and fear that literary tradition—the authority of which Modernist writers rejected on the grounds that it was no longer relevant, given the problems of the modern world, but for which they expressed some nostalgia—would dictate the opinions of the rising semi-educated classes, whose own judgment would be stifled rather than developed by their literary education. Forster rejects closure on this issue, revealing instead the problems associated with literacy for the uninitiated. Chapter II also addresses “Other Kingdom,” in which Forster provides another model of unspoiled, innocent, impulsive reading and its transformative power for one who believes in that power, and contrasts this model once again with the attitude that literacy’s value is primarily for social advancement.

Chapter III continues my discussion of E. M. Forster by focusing closely on *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*. These examples show how Forster’s concern with literacy operates in longer works, as well as demonstrating its pervasiveness across genres. As Modernist literacy novels, *A Room with a View* and *Howards End* operate very differently from each other and from Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, though Forster shares Woolf’s vision of a literacy that increases vulnerability and increases the misery of material disadvantage. In *A Room with a View*, the heroine’s danger derives from her easy acceptance of surface impressions gained from books which threatens to separate her from the world of experiences and emotion. In this novel, the written text may lack substance, and mislead the reader to expect what it is not capable of offering, as in Lucy’s reliance on the Baedeker. Lucy’s journey in the novel is one of learning how to

seek meaning, and from what source(s). The two novels share the theme of connection, framed by the epigraph to *Howard's End*: "Only connect," though ideas gained from books fail to create viable connections between individuals in one novel, and distract from the necessity of connecting to one's feelings in the other. The most meaningful scenes of reading in *Howard's End* are the doomed efforts of Leonard Bast, whose intellectual activity is constantly threatened by the intrusion of material circumstances and bodies. His contact with the Schlegels, which is occasioned by literate activity, is the cause of his death from falling books, demonstrating that material limitations on knowledge are, for a poor man, absolute.

Chapter IV addresses the literacy fiction of D. H. Lawrence, a near-contemporary of Forster's who shared many of Forster's intellectual contexts. In his semi-autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence portrays a family in transition from one illiterate and one somewhat literate parent to children whose literacy helps them advance socially from their (albeit complex) working class origins. Interactions between characters, strained at best, are often framed by contexts in which literacy creates or emphasizes inequality—first in the case of the parents, and then among members of the younger generation. The mother's education, which corresponds to her slightly higher social position, sets her at odds with her working class, semi-literate husband, though, unlike her sons, her literacy does not extend much beyond her religious reading, which again sets her at odds with her husband's more working class morality. This inequality of literacy is inversely replicated in the younger generation, as the youngest son assumes a pedagogical relationship with a young woman of similar class, though the daughter of

a farmer rather than a miner, whom he adopts as a girlfriend and exploits sexually and emotionally. As in Forster's novels, differences in levels of literacy contribute to the failure of the characters to connect, in part because the characters themselves are inherently flawed, but also because characters find themselves separated by the ideas in texts they read and by differing levels of literacy.

Lawrence provides a context for readers to interpret scenes of reading, and, especially, scenes of reading pedagogy in his *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, a treatise on the development of the mind from childhood, including that development achieved through education. His ideal educational construct calls for the displacement of reading in favor of action. He considers "ideas," specifically ideas gained through reading the newspaper, as damaging to the "dynamic souls" (82) of young individuals. This gives the reader of Lawrence an insight into scenes in his novels in which ideas gained from reading (presumably) inferior texts create crises in the action or mental activities of his characters, and points to the dual methodology necessary when examining scenes of reading in literature. Examining the attitudes of characters toward reading, and how literacy is used by characters within novels demonstrates the importance of the act of reading to the society within and action of the novel, while the attitude of the author toward the characters who use literacy in discreet social or intellectual contexts may communicate potential dangers of literacy to the reader or imply how literacy and the act of reading might improve the reader, or be improved upon by the reader.

Chapter V analyzes the works of Aldous Huxley, who addresses many of the philosophies of his friend and correspondent D. H. Lawrence. The two differ greatly in



their portrayal of literacy in their novels, however, in part because the mode of Huxley's most well known fictional work is dystopian fantasy rather than realistic fiction. Unlike Lawrence's portrayal, the discrepancy between the role of literacy within the society of *Brave New World* and the attitude toward literacy suggested by the action of the story point to an incorrect regard for literacy within society that is based on a diminished regard for literacy's usefulness. Reading, far from being regarded as useful within the society of Huxley's dystopia, is regarded as dangerous to social stability. Within the novel, the (actual) reader finds characters whose sense of self is absent or incomplete because they lack the capacity for self-examination, a trait linked to reading in the novel. However, like Forster's novels, *Brave New World* also portrays the individual who reads superficially, and lives by these superficial impressions. Huxley portrays, more specifically, a character who has read a limited series of works repeatedly and superficially, and has had his consciousness marked by the superficially ingested works.

Chapter VI, the Conclusion, draws from the previous chapters in order to create a sense of the "literate anxiety" that gave rise to literacy fiction as a recognizable genre of British literature in the early decades of the twentieth century. This chapter recontextualizes the phenomenon historically, providing background on the social history of the period that may have affected authors' awareness of the processes and effects of reading and writing. It suggests the ways in which other canonical Modernists participated in the same inquiry into literate activity that is found in Woolf, Forster, Lawrence and Huxley, though these others, like T. S. Eliot, did not necessarily write works that can be considered "literacy fiction." Finally, the conclusion indicates the

ways in which later writers of the Twentieth Century developed literacy fiction, following either the path of Aldous Huxley and writing in the mode of dystopian science fiction, or else writing fiction that resembles more closely the novels of Forster and Lawrence in their use of the realist mode and their concern with socio-economic, class, and by extension, racial issues.

**CHAPTER II**

**LITERACY FANTASY, IMAGINATION, AND MATERIAL REALITY**

**IN E. M. FORSTER'S "CELESTIAL OMNIBUS" AND "OTHER KINGDOM"**

Although the criticism of E. M. Forster has not addressed the representation of readers and ideas about reading expressed in his fiction, a preoccupation with the written word and the cognitive processes and social results of literacy permeates his short fiction and his novels. Of his shorter fiction, the short stories "The Celestial Omnibus" and "Other Kingdom" represent Forster's most complete considerations of literate activity and the position and activity of the literate individual within society, a topic Forster revisits in his novels. These short stories present a condensed portrait of the purpose of literacy in society and the life of the individual. In "The Celestial Omnibus," Forster delivers an allegory of reading that suggests the difference between social uses of literacy and the true imaginative enjoyment of the literate act, an individual rather than socially-prescribed function. "Other Kingdom" develops the idea that imaginative uses of literacy enhance self-awareness and allow escape from social oppression. My discussion of "Celestial Omnibus" and "Other Kingdom" is informed by the cultural capital theories of Pierre Bourdieu. Because literacy theory has been criticized, especially by social scientists and those concerned with literacy as social institution rather than more abstract theoretical conceptualizations associated most readily with Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan, I offer a nuanced version of literacy theory informed by Bourdieu's theories, which is also relevant to Forster's much-noted concern

with social class. In particular, cultural capital theory complements literacy theory by providing for the operation of literacy within class-based society as a method of cultural transmission that conveys its own rank and privilege within society.

Bourdieu describes the way in which culture, having its own “code,” is accessible only to those who have access to the “code” through education or social standing—the cultural version of the “social climber” or the cultural “blue blood,” raised to culture through the family. This description of the acquisition of culture gives an initial insight into the similarities between the literate act, which can be a vehicle for the transmission of culture, and Bourdieu’s description of cultural acquisition, which focuses primarily on the visual arts and music. Psychological studies of literacy examine literacy as a cognitive act of “decoding,” while sociological studies of literacy focus specifically on literacy as a tool that allows—or prohibits—the individual’s successful operation within society. Bourdieu links the concepts of “decoding” and social value by revealing that, in the case of “culture,” the decoding process is selectively transmitted, creating an elite group of connoisseurs who thus possess “culture,” which then becomes a commodity to be used to their social advantage. The similarity between literacy as a cognitive act of decoding and Bourdieu’s description of the appreciation of art as a “cognitive acquirement, a cultural code” (Bourdieu 3) suggests that the analogy between social acquisition of literacy and social acquisition of culture is an appropriate one. In Forster’s texts, it becomes apparent that the literate act is also the means to social advancement on a base level. An alternate model shows

literary consumption yielding transcendence in Forster's fiction, but with grave consequences for those who defy the "cultural capital" model of literacy.

Bourdieu's theories further illuminate Forster's texts by exposing the hierarchical dichotomy between the aesthetic and the human. While literacy studies tend toward the humanistic, books, especially certain books, and the literature they contain, can be regarded as aesthetic objects. If accessibility in a work of art marks it as something unintellectual, debased, and something that inspires immediate pleasure, rendering it inferior, inaccessibility creates an elite group of intellectuals able to partake of intellectual capital exclusively. Art that appeals to the intellect thus exists in a position that is hierarchically superior to what Bourdieu describes as the "popular aesthetic" (Bourdieu 32). Forster dramatizes the hierarchy by portraying intellectual snobbery in "The Celestial Omnibus," but associates this snobbery with confused or unpleasant characters. By contrast, Forster privileges naïve but insightful readers in "The Celestial Omnibus" and "Other Kingdom," providing for their triumph over personal adversity while resisting any easy solution to the complications of literacy.

### **"The Celestial Omnibus"**

In "The Celestial Omnibus," E. M. Forster uses the mode of fantasy to direct the reader's attention toward the practice of reading itself. The story involves two main characters, the "boy" and Mr. Bons, each of whom implicitly represents a distinct "model" of literacy—an attitude toward reading the works contained in the literary "heaven" to which the boy ascends. As the text of the story does not explicitly refer to

the reading process, the consequences or the varying cognitive levels of the reading experience, many critics interpret Forster's allegory as a general statement about Art and Poetic Truth rather than as an indirect statement about the process of reading. Forster, while operating within the conventions of fantasy, also situates his story within familiar social contexts. Thus, Mr. Bons is not merely a reader, he is "church-warden," "candidate for the County City Council" (Forster 30), and "President of the Literary Society" (Forster 41)—a reader with a specific social status, and his reading practice corresponds to what one would expect from the titles that he is given in the story. Within "The Celestial Omnibus," Forster questions and exposes the attitude toward learning that would make reading a means to establish social credentials. He resists objectification of the literary work that renders it indistinguishable from the "taste" of the reader with "academic capital"—the educational credentials that provide "taste"—or the physical object—however richly bound—in which it is contained. Though a member of the cultural elite himself, as a writer, Forster subverts the position of the educated reader, substituting instead instinctive, spiritual response and emotional investment in reading; however, the subversion is complicated by the action of the story, which physically separates the "boy," the instinctive, enthusiastic reader, from society in the end.

Much of the criticism of "The Celestial Omnibus" dates from the 1970s and earlier, and these early articles frequently do not delve past summary of the work and its main themes. In particular, critics address the "obtuseness" of the "learned" Mr. Bons,

as in this 1968 summary from Denis Godfrey's *E. M. Forster's Other Kingdom*, which contextualizes the story in reference to Godfrey's discussion of "the unseen":

[T]he unseen is made to erupt right in the heart of everyday suburban reality . . . in the form of a mysterious omnibus in which the boy is conveyed skywards into the realm of the imagination, escorted and welcomed thither by some of the creators of great literature and their created characters—Dante, for example, and Sir Thomas Browne, Mrs. Gamp, the great Achilles. Obtuseness, spiritual insensitivity is here contributed by Mr. Septimus Bons, president of the local Literary Society, an expert on Dante<sup>13</sup>, and possessor of no less than seven copies of the works of Shelley. Mr. Bons committed to the unseen through the medium of literature also makes the journey with the boy in the celestial omnibus; but while the boy is set in spiritual triumph on the shield of Achilles, Mr. Bons, confronted at last with the reality of the literature he had theorized about so long and so glibly, panics and falls. (Godfrey 11)

Similarly, in his study of *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice* (1975), John Colmer stresses the snobbishness of Mr. Bons, "whose name is 'snob' reversed," and his

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<sup>13</sup> In spite of Godfrey's claims, Mr. Bons's knowledge of Dante may be seen as incomplete at best, as he fails to recognize that the substitution of "*baldanza*" (swagger) for "*speranza*" (hope) in the line "*Lasciate ogni speranza voi che entrate*" (Leavitt and Mitchell xvi) is appropriate in reference to the heaven they approach; in Dante's *Purgatorio*, Pride is purged as the first sin whose removal is necessary in order to continue toward the ultimate goal of salvation. Wilcox notes that *Purgatorio* was Forster's favorite book of the *Commedia* (Wilcox 194).

inability to accept the “heroes of literature and the great writers of the past” when he meets them, although he “talks knowledgeably about literature and art” (Colmer 34).

The most comprehensive study of the story is Stewart Wilcox’s 1956 article “The Allegory of Forster’s ‘The Celestial Omnibus,’” which nevertheless does not fully develop the allegory of *reading* in the story. In his discussion, Wilcox stresses the boy’s innocence, the allusiveness of the story itself, and the dichotomy between what is real (literature) and what is unreal (London). Wilcox thus argues that the story upholds the reality of “Artistic Truth” while exposing Mr. Bons’s own failure to grasp the tangible reality of this Truth. Wilcox briefly mentions the story as an allegory of reading by noting that “the fame and works of each writer are a coach which is a means of carrying idealistic readers from their mundane surroundings up the highroad of literature into the realm of the imagination” (Wilcox 193), but this is clearly not his primary interest in the story. Rather, he sees Forster as privileging the “boy’s romantic adventurousness in yearning after knowledge,” “like Tennyson rather than Dante” (Wilcox 196), and celebrating “the world of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* made eternal in ancient myth and modern sonnet” (Wilcox 195), thus producing an ideal “blend [of] the divine and imaginative from ancient, medieval, and modern literature” (Wilcox 196). Wilcox also stresses the idea that literature is, as Forster’s Dante says, “the means and not the end” (Forster 45) and that the boy is “seeking after the Grail through literature” (Wilcox 196). His discussion of the allegory stops short of naming what this “end” is, concluding only that the boy achieves a “spiritual victory” (Wilcox 196) through his courageous search



for knowledge, which, Wilcox implies, can transform any literary text into a biblical or scriptural text, the textual means to spiritual salvation.

In his interaction with literary works of art in “The Celestial Omnibus,” Mr. Bons represents several of the qualities that Bourdieu associates with both the elite and bourgeois attempts to control and possess—both defining and limiting access to—culture. His attitudes represent a commodification of art reliant on a predetermined “code,” his access to which is indicated by his titles. As, among other things, the “President of the Literary Society,” Mr. Bons gains his cultural status or credentials (literally, his literary credentials) by way of literacy, presumably through education. He is middle class—albeit upper middle class—as indicated by his association with the boy’s family, who are clearly bourgeois of a less educated type; his social position is certainly not hereditary. Among his other cultural attributes are his “beautiful house,” willingness to “lend one books” and “donate to the Free Library enormously,” and his social status, which is marked by the fact that he has “Members of Parliament to stop with him” (Forster 30). It is because of this “cultural capital” that the boy feels that he is “probably the wisest person alive” (Forster 30).

Mr. Bons’s relationship to books bestows his titles of nobility; the reader is given no academic credentials, but may perhaps assume them from his other titles. Inevitably, the reader judges him by what he does with books—both in the process of reading and analyzing them and in his possession and valuing of books as material objects. In response to the mother’s description of the two volumes of Shelley in the household, to emphasize the contrast between the Philistine parents and his own

education and taste, Mr. Bons replies, “I believe we have seven Shelleys” (Forster 31). Mr. Bons is arrogantly self-conscious of his learned status. Accordingly, though he supports the boy’s new interest and seeming sympathetic response to poetry—specifically, the poetry of Keats—Mr. Bons is impatient with the boy’s fanciful tales of his trip on the omnibus (Forster 40). In the case of his “appreciation” of Dante, Mr. Bons seems to possess a semi-religious reverence for Dante’s works that the reader recognizes as “appropriate,” yet he defines Dante to the boy strictly in terms of the material objects in which Dante’s works are contained in his own library: “Do you remember those vellum books in my library, stamped with red lilies? This—sit still, I bring you stupendous news!—*this is the man who wrote them!*” (42). The emphasis here, as in the case of the “seven Shelleys,” is on Mr. Bons’s material ownership of the volumes rather than on the content of the volumes. Mr. Bons is established as the kind of bourgeois figure who values books as much (if not more) for their costliness as objects and the appearance of culture that they lend to him than their content, a failing of the pseudo-intellectual that carries special significance in Bourdieu’s construct. However, Mr. Bons’s objectification of the books themselves also extends to his use of the knowledge gained through his study of the books, though this objectification is revealed more as he is contrasted with the boy in the mind of the reader. Indeed, the reader becomes intertwined in the judgments being leveled at Mr. Bons and those who are overly-analytical. While the reader recognizes, from his/her own “training” in cultural knowledge, that the reverence that Mr. Bons displays for the works of Dante is

appropriate, he/she is called upon to reevaluate the very situation of cultural knowledge in which she/he is, to a greater or lesser degree, a participant.

Mr. Bons's reading is marked by an aesthetic detachment derived from his learning. Confronted with the boy's "imaginary" journey and its references to literary figures and experiences, Mr. Bons remarks dispassionately, "It is odd how, in quite illiterate minds, you will find glimmers of Artistic Truth" (Forster 39). Though Forster seems to support the primary response of the boy and demonstrates the veracity of Mr. Bons's observation that the boy has discovered a "glimmer of Artistic Truth," the language in which he expresses this opinion, his further abstraction of the "boy" into an "illiterate mind" as well as his use of the third person, which suggests a scientific observation made to one's self rather than a complimentary remark to another, indicate his distanced regard for the boy's experience of art. This impartial distance from the passionate reaction of another is symptomatic of Mr. Bons's resistance to the spiritual involvement in reading demanded by the inhabitants of the literary heaven to which they are escorted. The literary figures themselves have predicted Mr. Bons's disbelief in the boy's story (Forster 40), presumably because his "literary," "educated" detachment does not allow a vantage point from which to understand the boy's tale of wonder. Dante, in his attempt to instruct Mr. Bons, stresses the importance of spiritual and emotional involvement in the process of reading as he says that "poetry is a spirit, and they that would worship it must worship in spirit and in truth" (Forster 45).

In "The Celestial Omnibus," Forster collapses the distinction between the human and the aesthetic; instead of being separate from humanity, the aesthetic—which

implicates humanity from the creation of the *objet d'art* or text through its appreciation by a consumer of culture—becomes associated with the humanity of the reader, the author, and the characters. Mr. Bons's reading is flawed because of the detachment that allows him to classify the works he has read, even when confronted by the works' humanity, as the characters and authors present themselves in physical, human form. Rather than acknowledge them *as* human when confronted with these characters as living personalities, his literary objectification persists. For example, he chastises the boy for being indiscriminate: ““Out there sits the man who wrote my vellum books!” thundered Mr. Bons, ‘and you talk to me of Dickens and of Mrs. Gamp?’” (Forster 42). Similarly, he tells the boy that he has “made a mess of it” (43), saying more to himself than to the boy, though not without a note of chastisement, ““Think of a cultured person with your opportunities!” (here, one might read “educational opportunities,” or at least “opportunities for self-improvement”):

A cultured person would have known all these characters and known what to have said to each. He would not have wasted his time with a Mrs. Gamp or a Tom Jones. The creations of Homer, of Shakespeare, and of Him who drives us now, would alone have contented him. He would not have raced. He would have asked intelligent questions. (Forster 43)

The particular hierarchy that Mr. Bons establishes here is between classical and modern authors, as the debate over which were more worthy of study was a common intellectual

dilemma of the early twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> However, it is his status as an intellectual that allows him to make these distinctions, and while contemporary intellectuals have established different hierarchies, the tendency to privilege certain authors remains.

Mr. Bons is able to separate the “high” from the “low” in his regard for the literary figures mentioned by the boy and present in the heaven, but he has objectified all of the figures to the degree that his study of literature and cultivation of taste dictates, eschewing any instinctual response. The same literary figures, the “high” as well as the “low,” are regarded by the boy as potential friends—co-adventurers—each one interesting in his or her own right and contributing to the boy’s overall experience of the literary heaven. This collapsing of critical boundaries, combined with the idea that each work of literature may be subject either to the objectifying gaze or the experience of the passions, shifts the emphasis from the work itself, which may be designated “highbrow,” “middlebrow” or “low brow” by critics interested in issues of canon or literary trends, to the reader.<sup>15</sup> Rather, emphasis is placed on the reader’s choice to experience literature as an adventure, something to be explored, internalized and *liked*, something that may, if permitted to do so, provoke an emotional response, or to experience literature as an object to be “appreciated” and “studied” or displayed to prove one’s superior taste. Bourdieu describes enjoyment of art through a suspension of judgment and disbelief as being “based on a form of *investment*, a sort of deliberate ‘naivety’, ingenuousness, good-natured credulity (‘We’re here to enjoy ourselves’)” (Bourdieu 33). By contrast,

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<sup>14</sup> Virginia Woolf may be seen as distancing herself from this debate in *The Common Reader*.

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Nicola Humble’s *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism*.

“[d]etachment, disinterestedness, indifference,” the characteristics of Mr. Bons or any other “discriminating” reader, represent “the refusal to invest oneself and take things seriously” (Bourdieu 34).

Ong notes that systems of classification such as the hierarchy of literary “taste,” as well as the objectification and distancing that Bourdieu cites as a product of society’s use of learning as capital, are results of literacy.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the phenomena that Bourdieu describes might be seen as symptoms of hyper-literacy, the results of an evolution of literate study rather than an abuse of the powers gained through education. If this is indeed the case, Forster’s privileging of the boy’s habits of reading might indeed be accurately described, in Mr. Bons’s phrasing, as the products of an “illiterate mind” that nevertheless grasps “Artistic Truth” (Forster 39); however, Mr. Bons uses “illiterate” to mean “semi-literate” or “uneducated” rather than “non-literate.” The boy is literate, but has not achieved this hyper-literacy, nor the cognitive complexes that allow for aesthetic distancing, though he may or may not possess other cognitive characteristics that Ong, Olson and others associate with the internalization of literacy. Because Mr. Bons and the boy represent different literate states, “The Celestial Omnibus” thus supports theories that “levels” of literacy exist within the same society,<sup>17</sup> and further suggests that both extremes—illiteracy and hyper-literacy—may be damaging to society and the individual,<sup>18</sup> resulting in dehumanization at both extremes. Mr. Bons’s habits of reading

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<sup>16</sup> See Ong 103-108.

<sup>17</sup> See for example, Shirley Brice Heath’s “Protean Shapes in Literacy Events” *Spoken and Written Language*.

<sup>18</sup> D. H. Lawrence addresses the danger literacy poses to the vital energy of the individual in his *Fantasia of the Unconscious*.

for classification and “appreciation” resemble “[t]he aesthetic disposition which tends to bracket off the nature and function of the object represented and to exclude any ‘naïve’ reaction—horror at the horrible, desire for the desirable, pious reverence for the sacred—along with all purely ethical responses, in order to concentrate solely on the mode of representation, the style, perceived and appreciated by comparison with other styles” (Bourdieu 54). Forster’s personification of the literary works reveals the callousness toward humanity that accompanies Mr. Bons’s classification—a callousness that is borne out by his treatment of the boy and attitude toward the boy’s parents. Meanwhile, Mr. Bons lacks the boy’s most attractive quality—the capacity for wonder and delight. This “lack” limits his capacity not only for belief, but also for enjoyment of the literature he admires and “knows” so thoroughly. Mr. Bons’s belief in “the essential truth of Poetry”—or “lack” of doubt (Forster 40)—is shown to be hollow, as he does not “feel” or experience that truth. It is as if his knowledge is too purely cerebral—hence, inadequately spiritual.

The boy’s experience of reading is based on a different aesthetic from either Bourdieu’s “popular aesthetic” or Bons’s learned aesthetic; it is a remnant of Romanticism’s idealization of the innocent. Although he does not consciously oppose the cultivated aesthetic of the cultural nobility, the boy’s response to the experience of texts is characterized by the “*investment*” that Mr. Bons denies himself—the willingness to become emotionally and spiritually engaged, “to enter into the game, identifying with the characters’ joys and sufferings, worrying about their fate, espousing their hopes and ideals, living their life” (Bourdieu 33). Hence, while Mr. Bons scorns Mrs. Gamp’s

“elevating company,” the boy sympathizes with her misfortunes: “Mrs. Gamp’s bandboxes have moved over the rainbow so badly. All the bottoms have fallen out, and two of the pippins off her bedstead tumbled into the stream” (Forster 42). This humanization of the characters is consistent with the boy’s own humanity, and suggests a generosity in dealing with other individuals that Mr. Bons and his own parents lack, a generosity enhanced by the act of engaging with the characters and literary figures as representative of texts.

This engagement is facilitated, first of all, by his curiosity. Indeed, curiosity links many of the traits of the boy’s reading process, as it implies interest in something outside of the self and openness to—if not a positive pursuit of—new experiences. Mr. Bons prefers the “safe” realm of experiences he can control through his status as cultural connoisseur, as indicated by his reluctance and the fear he feels when confronted first with the omnibus, then with the bus’s destination. By contrast, although he fears ridicule, the boy first seeks knowledge of the sign that reads “To Heaven” from his parents. He is not satisfied by his mother’s vague responses or assertion that the sign is “a joke” and so means “nothing at all” (Forster 30). In a further spirit of inquiry, he asks Mr. Bons about the sign, who then introduces the name of Shelley and makes the boy feel inferior intellectually, as his parents have made him feel merely “silly.” Nevertheless, though convinced of his silliness, he investigates first the alley, then the omnibus, proving himself to be motivated and full of a spirit of inquiry, even in the face of ridicule.



The boy approaches the literary figures he has encountered through his curiosity with a sense of adventure, suggesting an active approach to reading and learning. Though Mr. Bons presumably also “pursued” his education, the active reading suggested by the boy’s attitude is active in the case of reading for engagement rather than disengagement or critical distance. He does not seek to regard those he meets dispassionately, convinced of his control of the situation, but meets the situation head-on, though not without fear of not being able to afford a ticket (Forster 35). When, on his first visit, as Jove’s thunderbolts are crashing around him, Sir Thomas Browne asks the boy if he is afraid, he responds by asking what there is to be afraid of (Forster 37). He exclaims, “oh listen,” “oh look,” and eagerly questions and greets his new surroundings with wonder and delight (Forster 37-38). To characterize the child’s response to intellectual stimuli as “active” echoes the educational philosophies of D. H. Lawrence as articulated in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, in which he considers “ideas,” specifically ideas gained through reading newspapers, as damaging to the “dynamic souls” (Lawrence 82) of young individuals. Though Lawrence’s solution to this tyranny of ideas is to displace reading in a child’s education, Forster’s “Celestial Omnibus” suggests instead that a child’s reading—if not tainted with “ideas” from the beginning—may be dynamic and active. This once again points to the tyranny of cultural perceptions gained through reading; though the newspaper is not considered a learned medium, the “ideas” that Mr. Bons has learned from his education are damaging to his own reading process, as they have limited his own active engagement with texts to predetermined reactions, by nature static.

Unlike Mr. Bons, the boy does not have a preconceived taxonomy of literature that dictates which works/authors are superior. Rather than “taste,” the boy merely has likes and dislikes. This becomes clear from his indiscriminate regard for the figures he meets. The boy prefers the company of Sir Thomas Browne, and even Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Harris, characters from Dickens, to Dante, though he admits (showing that those who do not possess the cultural codes may still have great insight) that he “shouldn’t be surprised if [Dante] had even more in him” (42) than the other figures. Besides being too young to have had his reactions to literary texts shaped by the opinions of critics and elders like Mr. Bons, the boy lacks this taxonomy because of his lack of academic capital. While “academic capital” is “the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school” (Bourdieu 23), in the boy’s case, neither of these social institutions will impart to him the academic capital possessed by Mr. Bons and other guardians of culture. Therefore, the assumption is that he will not achieve the status of a cultural/literary connoisseur, and so will not have access to the “essential truth of Poetry” (Forster 40). Although the story tells little about his education, it seems likely that he has not yet reached the level of education at which literature is a subject of study. The other means of transmission of cultural knowledge, the family, is shown to be completely “Philistine”—representing the ignorant bourgeois class described by Matthew Arnold in “Culture and Anarchy.” The parents of “[t]he boy who resided at Agathox Lodge, 28, Buckingham Park Road, Surbiton” (30) are very ordinary residents of suburban London. The father, though “very kind” (30), mocks his son’s questions, and those of any child. His “shrieks of

laughter” suggest either an element of cruelty or stupidity in his disposition. The mother of the boy reveals herself to have no literary knowledge whatsoever, even forgetting the name of Shelley, though she exclaims to Mr. Bons that they are not “Philistines,” that they have two volumes of Shelley “at the least” (31). However, her reference to Arnold’s critique of the inadequately educated sensibility of the middle classes is proven by the explanation that follows: rather than being purchased for study or pleasure, of the volumes of Shelley, “[o]ne [was] a wedding present,” while the other adorns “one of the spare rooms” as an empty testimony to culture or mere decoration. The attitude of the parents toward reading is further indicated by their choice of punishment for his tales of fancy: “The boy was in disgrace. He sat locked up in the nursery of Agathox Lodge, learning poetry for a punishment” (38). Rather than a vehicle for transport of the soul, literature is, for the boy’s parents, a dull, ultimately trivial task. The boy’s parents even fail to see the social uses of literary knowledge, which at the very least allows one the superiority felt by Mr. Bons, and arguably, an increase in social status if one is able to use this knowledge effectively to entertain Members of Parliament, etc.

By contrast, “illiterate” though he is in terms of culturally useful knowledge, ignorant of the “educated” code that allows for the culturally controlled access to, hence exploitation of the literary text, the boy finds adventure and enjoyment in reading. He exhibits two striking traits: the ability to get beyond one’s own personality to empathize with others, as in the case of his sorrow over Mrs. Gamp’s furniture, and the ability to relate his own spiritual experiences to the words of others. While both traits involve empathy, the former, empathy with others, is recognizable as something derived, or

potentially deepened, by the unfettered engagement with texts—the investment that allows one to become absorbed in personalities beyond one’s own. The second may be described as a kind of literary empathy, and emerges as an asset to true enjoyment of literature. For example, when Sir Thomas Browne says of his poetry that “by reason of the cunning goblets wherein I offered [my draughts], the queasy soul was oftentimes tempted to sip and be refreshed” (36), the boy relates his own feeling when “the sun sets with trees in front of it, and you suddenly come strange all over” (36) to Browne’s phrase “the queasy soul.” This ability to find oneself in the words of another, echoed in the boy’s explanation to Mr. Bons of his relationship to Keats’ sonnet (40), may be regarded as an empathetic, receptive approach to literature.

The boy is further classified as an ideal reader because of his ability (and willingness) to stand by himself—an ability that becomes especially important in the last moments of the story. In part, it is his parents’ own ignorance—a cultural illiteracy so extreme that it admits no usefulness in reading literature—that gives the boy the incentive to stand on his own. His curiosity and lack of satisfactory response from the adults around him first propel the boy to investigate the alley. Then, it is almost with a sense of defiance—coupled with a “glimpse” he has had in his sleep of the omnibus’s “destination”—that leads to his entering the alley at sunrise, which “required some courage”<sup>19</sup> (Forster 33). Although he is inclined to return to his parents in shame when the bus does not arrive as expected, he returns to the alley with the “cynical” thought,

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<sup>19</sup> The boy does require some bolstering from a source of authority in this case. The narrative reveals that “[i]f it had not been for a policeman, whom he heard approaching through the fog, he never would have made the attempt” (Forster 33).

“Give the bus every chance,” at which point the omnibus is there. The use of the adjective “cynically” to refer to the boy’s thinking, here, speaks both of doubt and the willingness to question himself as he has questioned the alley, the sign, and his elders’ dismissal of the alley’s mystery. He is resolved, then, to stand by himself for a little longer, but his thinking has deepened as he anticipates the approach either of new knowledge or his own disillusion. His ability to stand on his own increases after his first literary encounter: he is able to recognize his own experience in the truth of Keats’ sonnet, not when he is memorizing it in shame, but when he stands to prove himself before Mr. Bons—as if the difference between himself and Mr. Bons, whom he still regards as a sympathetic figure, allows for his self-realization. In this act of repetition for another, the text has been internalized and begins to influence the boy’s consciousness. Inevitably, Dante will tell Mr. Bons to “[s]tand by yourself, as that boy has stood”—to experience literature for himself without predetermined cultural perceptions as a prop—as the boy takes his place, borne in honor on Achilles’ shield (Forster 43).

Though he is rewarded for his efforts by being carried in honor on the shield of Apollo, the boy’s situation in the story is not without complication, and it is necessary to temper the seeming optimism of the innocent’s approach to reading with caution, as the resolution of the story indicates. Forster reveals that there are two potential pitfalls in which the boy may become trapped: the influence of Mr. Bons, whom the boy greatly admires until the end, and an absorption in literature that is so complete that he can no longer interact with the material world. Because of his admiration for Mr. Bons and his

desire to impress him and be like him, the boy is sobered, though initially “a little sore” because of being “disbelieved and then . . . lectured” (Forster 43). However, he responds to Mr. Bons’s desire to be with “a reverent and sympathetic person” with “a hundred good resolutions”:

He would imitate Mr. Bons all the visit. He would not laugh, or run, or sing, or do any of the vulgar things that must have disgusted his new friends last time.

He would be very careful to pronounce their names properly, and to remember who knew whom. Achilles did not know Tom Jones—at least, so Mr. Bons said.

The Duchess of Malfi was older than Mrs. Gamp—at least, so Mr. Bons said. He would be self-conscious, reticent, and prim. He would never say he liked anyone. (Forster 43)

Though the boy’s “good resolutions” disappear when he views the scene outside of the omnibus—an aesthetic re-awakening of sorts—the seeds of his cultural conditioning, his integration into the system of educational capital, are present in his mental response to Mr. Bons. While skeptically repeating of the phrase, “so Mr. Bons said,” the boy begins, under Mr. Bons’s influence, to refer to his natural, innocent reactions as “vulgar,” to limit his investment in the experiences of those he meets, and to learn the taxonomy by which Mr. Bons judges literature. Mr. Bons’s condemnation, however, registers ironically for the reader, who recognizes that the boy *is* sympathetic. However, he stands to lose the sympathy he has gained from having discovered and being absorbed

into this new world, particularly his regard for the misfortunes of others, as he risks separation from the real world and its inhabitants, through absorption into the literary heaven.

Unlike Bourdieu's description of the "cultured" connoisseur, "distance" the boy achieves from the world is not "elective"—Mr. Bons has confiscated his return ticket. However, it is unlikely that the boy would easily become readjusted to everyday life if he did return, whether because of his experiences or Mr. Bons's mysterious death. Although Forster suggests the compelling notion that each individual has the capacity for spiritual communion with the essence of literature, provided that he or she is open to such a communion, Mr. Bons, representative of the intellectual elite, is more connected to society and the human life-world than the boy's aesthetic, which is comprised of his "vulgar," instinctive reactions. While Mr. Bons's cultural education allows for his various social roles, the boy's more spiritual, less educated (and, hence, less socially conditioned) aesthetic response is more removed from the social "reality" of the world he inhabits at the beginning of the story—the world the reader recognizes as the "real" or "natural" world. Mr. Bons's proximity to social "reality" does not imply that his cognitive use of reading has more vitality. Rather, because his use of literacy has been socially conditioned, he is able to use it to his social advantage. Thus, for Mr. Bons reading becomes a skill to be exploited, though one must perhaps grant that some level of enjoyment (or perhaps appreciation) of literature must have seduced him into his current hyper-literate, hyper-critical state. By contrast, the boy is separated from daily life in the world, albeit happily, though it is significant that his pedagogical superior,

who has sought to dampen (or regulate) his enthusiasm throughout the adventure of reading, has been the means to his disenfranchisement. The boy can no longer interact with others in the world, which, as he is a young boy, should seem unnatural to the reader on some level. Taken allegorically, the boy's situation at the end of the story might represent another hyper-literate extreme besides the hyper-critical distancing represented by Mr. Bons. The boy is so absorbed in literature as to make it an escape, and through seeking transcendence of the world, has become lost to the world entirely, along with the insights he has gained from literature that might have informed and enhanced his existence in the world and, especially, his interaction with other people. The boy's sympathetic responses to the literary characters and his ability to connect his own experience of beauty in the world to the beauty described in poetry (as in his own experience of a "queasy soul") suggest an overall humanism that may have been transferred to his actions in the "real world."

The boy ascends, or transcends the world, entering a heaven from which he can not return, meeting an end of sorts, but one that is decidedly non-violent. Mr. Bons, by contrast, falls from a height—simultaneously cast out of the literary heaven and cast from his seemingly secure position of intellectual superiority in a sort of pseudo-intellectual's "tragic fall"—and is mangled and broken by the process. Herz notes, "It is indeed a conclusion of Dantesque tonality. His punishment is to see and not to know how to believe, so atrophied has his library-bound imagination become, his fall and mutilation emblematic of his spiritual death" (34). Though the allegory of reading ends with the death or disappearance of both allegorical figures—the enthusiastic,



adventurous reader and the opportunistic, materialist reader—sympathy and empathy, and a position between these two extremes, are key to understanding the role of reading practice in the life of the individual *within* society. However, the boy may offer further clues to the benefits of reading to the life of the individual. If the heaven itself is not the “end” of the journey of reading, the “end” may perhaps be the deepening of consciousness that the boy begins to experience, which should then shape his interactions with the material world. The idea of the transformative potential of literate activity and the possible “middle ground” between the reading styles of Mr. Bons and the boy surface in Forster’s “Other Kingdom.”

### **“Other Kingdom”**

Forster’s “Other Kingdom” stresses the benefits of reading and *experiencing* literature rather than exploiting books and learning for one’s own (material) ends, refining and expanding notions of the uses of literacy and potential of literacy within the life of the individual that are introduced in “The Celestial Omnibus.” “Other Kingdom” belongs to the category of stories that have come to be classified as Forster’s “Greenwood” stories. The “greenwood,” which Forster “invented” in 1902-3 and which effectively “ended” with his writing of *Maurice* (Ellem 89), is described “in its simplest aspect” by Elizabeth Wood Ellem as “a refuge from the cultural and intellectual life: the habitat of the unspoilt, uneducated country dweller” or “a place of spontaneous joy, of incredible happiness, where the fortunate learn the secrets of Nature” (89). Though in its earliest incarnation in the story “Ansell,” the “inhabitants [of the greenwood] . . . despise

book-learning” (89) in “Other Kingdom,” a “second generation” greenwood story, “book-learning,” or rather, enjoyment of reading and the possibilities that literacy opens for the individual, is enhanced by the naïveté of the unspoiled country figure, here, a female, Evelyn Beaumont, whose name is itself a “beautiful mountain,” and by the closeness to nature of Miss Beaumont’s reading matter. Her name carries further “natural” associations, a link to John Evelyn, “whose *Sylva* was written about those woods around Abinger that Forster would later celebrate in his *Abinger Pageant*” (Herz 33). Her primary reading matter, a passage from Virgil that begins the story, is key to the central character’s communion with nature and eventual escape into nature.

In Evelyn Beaumont, it is easy to recognize a reading figure akin to “the boy” in “The Celestial Omnibus.” Like the boy, she is a figure whose encounter with literacy first enlightens her, enhancing her sense of the wonder of things, which is already well-developed, then allows her to escape the repressive real-world situation in which she finds herself, resulting in a transformation that removes her from the world permanently. The story begins with a scene of reading and translation, in which the narrator, Inskip, introduces Miss Beaumont as his pupil who is learning to translate Latin and learning about the presence of gods in the natural world, specifically, within wooded areas. It is evident from this scene that Miss Beaumont is an enthusiastic pupil. She follows the translation—both the colloquial and “acceptable” versions—and demonstrates her knowledge of the supernatural inhabitants of the natural world. However, when confronted by her fiancé’s mother, she is unable to designate a practical “use” for her classical education, though Ford suggests that the classics “teach you how to dodge

things” (48), and Inskip suggests that as Miss Beaumont is “new to [English] civilization,” Latin, as part of the origins of “modern life” is a useful grounding for knowledge of the modern world.

Miss Beaumont’s “newness” to “civilization,” her “foreignness” to Inskip, Mrs. Worters, and her fiancé Harcourt Worters, is also the source of her nearness to nature, her innocence, and her unspoiled enthusiasm for learning. Her foreignness is literal in the sense that she has been hand-picked from Ireland “without money, without connexions, almost without antecedents” (54) by Harcourt to be his bride. Her Irishness serves to explain her sympathy with nature as the boy’s youth provides the reason for his spiritual response to literature. Her spirituality, closeness to nature, and instinctive aesthetic, though providing the initial attraction, are untamed and unpredictable elements that Harcourt, as the representative of Empire, must contain, as when he fences in the Other Kingdom copse; her enthusiasm for learning to read the classics and her belief in them, fueled by her spirituality, make the stories literally possible and serve to liberate her from the fences of civilization and marriage to Harcourt.

If Miss Beaumont is the nearest analogue to the boy in “The Celestial Omnibus,” the narrator, Inskip, most nearly resembles Mr. Bons. Though he is considerably younger than Mr. Bons, Inskip likewise uses his learning to gain his social position. Described by critics as “a toady, a tale-bearer” (Herz 33), one who is “cynically aware of the side on which his bread is buttered” (Godfrey 12), Inskip functions in the story as the narrator and tutor of Miss Beaumont and Mr. Ford, who are under the guardianship of the wealthy Harcourt Worters. Thus, his position, though one of economic servitude, is

within the educated elite, defined by the extent of his learning, particularly his knowledge of classics. Mr. Worters' own position on learning is epitomized by his question, asked of Inskip about Miss Beaumont, "'this Latin and Greek—what will she do with it? Can she make anything of it? Can she—well, it's not as if she will ever have to teach it to others'" (58). Worters clearly sees only utilitarian function in education; however, Worters does not conceive of the utility of education in a vocational sense, as might usually be associated with the term "utilitarian." Rather, he sees social uses for education—first, the need for his intended bride to learn things better suited to her gender and to domesticity, like Tennyson's Arthurian Romances.<sup>20</sup> However, his discourse also suggests that the Irish (hence, barely civilized) Miss Beaumont should study literature, like Tennyson, that will also indoctrinate her more fully into English culture, which Worters' phrase "*our* habits—*our* thoughts" may be taken to imply, as opposed to those of the Romans and Greeks (58, emphasis mine).<sup>21</sup> Though he initially defends the Classics against this "socially utilitarian" view, Inskip's narrative indicates

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<sup>20</sup> Tennyson's Arthurian Romances, however, while looking to an imaginary "golden age" of Britain, also deal with the downfall of this order, while the relationship of Arthur and Guinivere (and Lancelot) is presumably not a desirable model for Worters' marriage, indicating that Worters has only a partial knowledge of this great work of English literature. It is interesting to note, here, since Dante played a significant role in "The Celestial Omnibus," that the actions that doomed Paolo and Francesca to hell in Dante's *Inferno* were inspired by their reading of Lancelot and Guinevere, particularly since Ford provides the potential third axis of a "love triangle" and is accused of stealing Miss Beaumont at the end of the story ("Other Kingdom" 70).

<sup>21</sup> In spite of his preoccupation with status and his own comfortable economic situation, Worters cannot himself be compared to Mr. Bons, as his own uses for literacy are very limited, and while he seems fairly well-educated, he does not value this learning, even as a commodity. Rather, he resembles the boy's parents from "The Celestial Omnibus," or the Wilcoxes of *Howards End*, whose interests do not extend beyond their economic sphere.

the deliberateness with which he modulates his position to suit his employer, responding affirmatively to Worters' reservations about the usefulness of a Classical education:

“‘That is true.’ And my features might have been observed to become undecided” (58).

Inskip, here, feels the need to impress upon his reader his calculated manipulation of his own speech and actions for the benefit of his employer.

Inskip's betrayal of the Classics parallels his betrayal of the human sentiments of Ford and Evelyn as he urges Ford to apologize for the content of his book and watches with detached, almost *academic* interest as Evelyn approaches Worters only to have her idealism about her fiancé shattered. Unlike the boy, who treats characters in books like people, Inskip treats people like books—objects to be observed and pondered. A self-reflective moment reveals how essential this objectification is to Inskip's sense of self, as he remarks about Miss Beamont, “If it were my place to like people, I could have liked her very much” (54). This refusal to form personal opinion is reminiscent of Mr. Bons's judgment of literary texts. Thus, the objectification or commodification of learning, in Inskip's case, transfers to life and the objectification or commodification of individuals, as in Worters' treatment of Evelyn. Inskip thus demonstrates the extreme social implications of Mr. Bons's attitude towards Dante, bound with lily-stamped covers (“Celestial Omnibus” 42). Worters, by comparison, would see Evelyn Beaumont bound indoors, as the Other Kingdom copse is bound by the fence and asphalt, and dressed in brown rather than green to signify her broken spirit—this change in outward appearance analogous in some ways to being bound like a manuscript to suit the taste of the owner or to fit better in the owner's library. Inskip is complicit in all of these plot

developments, dispassionately “reading” the events which form the plot of his narrative. Herz argues, however, that Inskip “is not completely untouched by those books on which his livelihood depends, aware, for example, of the nature of Ford’s ‘robust dreams, which take him, not to heaven, but to another earth’” (Herz 33). Inskip’s potential sensitivity to Ford’s imaginative self-awareness, and the hint of an empathy similar to that with which the boy approaches the experience of literature, merely make his turning away from the ideals represented by Ford more dramatic when he rejects idealism for financial gain.

The observation, made by Inskip about Ford, that Ford’s dreams “take him not to heaven, but to another earth” (52) suggests that Ford may be the answer to the dilemma posed by the destruction of Mr. Bons and isolation of the boy at the end of the “Celestial Omnibus” and the subsequent failure of each to connect satisfactorily with the world. Ford, described by one critic as “a matured version . . . of the boy in ‘The Celestial Omnibus’” (Godfrey 12), emerges as one who has the capacity to experience the wonder of reading, yet who is not destroyed by this capacity, and does not offer his literate consciousness for sale as does the narrator Inskip. As a result, he is neither removed from the real world, like the boy and Evelyn Beaumont, nor does he allow himself to be debased by conforming to the “correct” view of literary value and advancing socially because of it, like Mr. Bons, or by selling his literacy in the service of another and relinquishing all enjoyment of literature (economic or imaginative) in doing so, like Inskip.

Ford's own relationship with literacy is complex, complicated further by being filtered through the perspective of Mr. Inskip, who gives the reader a particularly provocative picture of Ford by describing his strength in terms of his reading: "Ford has no right to be strong, but he is. He never did his dumb-bells or played in his school fifteen. But the muscles came. He thinks they came while he was reading Pindar" (55). Ford, unlike many of the characters involved in Forster's scenes of reading, demonstrates not only the ability to read; he also possesses a command of the written word. Thus, he is both a consumer and a producer of written texts, and so his literacy is doubly advanced and functions as a doubly useful tool for his cognition and individualism. His notebook contains records of the spoken language of those around him, presumably a very basic form of writing—transcription rather than composition—such as the remarks of Miss Beaumont: "I saw him make an entry. . . 'Eternity: practically ninety-nine years'" (51). However, Ford also demonstrates his sardonic humor through his notebook with his portraits of Harcourt and expresses his feelings about Evelyn. This latter, which translates strong emotion that has become a cognitive awareness into writing, where it may be understood by another, may be regarded as a more "advanced" and creative use of literacy than simple record-keeping, which is Inskip's eventual function for Harcourt as his "secretary" (67).

Significantly, it is a book—this notebook—that is Ford's downfall with Worters. Marked "Private" and "Practically a Book" (51), it is, because of its fixed, material nature, subject to discovery by others to whom the material within is not addressed. This indicates the truth of Ford's cynical re-titling of the book "Practically Private" (61), a

title that may be applied to all books, since the act of writing fixes ideas and words into space, both removing context and the potential for protective possession. Jahandarie elaborates on the difference between speech, which he classifies as “evanescent,” and writing, which has permanence:

The spoken word is transient; it disappears as soon as it is uttered. [. . .] Written words, on the other hand, are lasting. They are preserved on paper; they can be returned to over and over again. Hence the old Roman maxim, *verba volant, scripta manent* (the words are gone but writing remains). Its higher “preservability” (Vachek’s term) gives writing a feeling of relative permanence that is absent from speech. (Jahandarie 134)

This permanence and fixity allows Worters’ discovery of Ford’s sentiments regarding himself and Miss Beaumont by removing the sentiments from the inherently private region of the psyche, or the ephemeral domain of conversation, and allowing them to move into the public sphere. The ultimate reason for this movement from private writing to public writing in Forster’s story is the impermanence, ironic in this context, of the label that reads “Private.” It is the impermanence of the written (hence, supposedly fixed) label that allows for Worters’ intrusion (61).

Ong reminds us that writing is “discourse which cannot be directly questioned or contested as oral speech can because the written discourse has been detached from its author” (Ong 78). It can thus be regarded as almost mystical, as the Delphic oracle, or



absolute, since it continues to make its statement regardless of the contestability of the statement. Thus, Ford is trapped by his written words, as a spoken apology, even were he to offer one, would not alter the content he had already composed. Ford's situation is unique and challenges this absolute quality of writing that Ong describes; in Ford's case, the literate act does not allow the author the protection that one might normally expect from a medium that cannot be questioned. Ong observes that "[t]he author might be challenged if only he or she could be reached, but the author cannot be reached in any book" (Ong 79). However, Ford exists in close physical proximity to his book, and is thus not protected by the "distance" usually attributed to writing. Literacy (writing rather than reading in this case) thus allows for discovery and punishment of ideas in addition to the discovery of new ideas, possibilities and experiences, and in addition to providing coping mechanisms for individuals like Ford.

The fates of both the semi-literate Miss Beaumont and the literate Ford, with his advanced command and use of literacy, are directly related to scenes of literate activity from earlier in the story. Miss Beaumont consummates the literate transformation foreshadowed by the translation sequence when she runs into the copse, pursued not by Apollo but by Harcourt, calling to Ford, as her co-pupil and deliverer, the one who first suggested the possibility of escape through transformation as an essential lesson of classical mythology, coming "through [him] to [her] Kingdom" (68). Ford himself, though he is expelled from Worters' presence rather than escaping, demonstrates in the scene of his meeting with Worters and Inskip at the end of the story his superior understanding of the supernatural event that has occurred and his ability to cope with the

circumstances following his expulsion from Worters' guardianship. Inskip recognizes that "[n]o one can break Ford now" (70). Though Ford's literacy causes his "downfall" from the house of Worters, it also (implicitly) bolsters his devotion to his own ideals and allows him to survive independently without apologizing for his thoughts and feelings or submitting his intellect to Harcourt's will, as Inskip does. When Harcourt and Inskip visit the now independent Ford at the end of the story, they find him, significantly, "seated at the table, *reading*" (70, emphasis mine). Their accusations do not disturb his composure; he is self-assured and confident. In contrast to the disbelieving Inskip, whose function has changed from one who teaches advanced literacy to others to one who uses his literacy for bookkeeping, and the confused Harcourt, who does not demonstrate significant literate awareness or use of literacy, Ford, perhaps because of his advanced mastery of both reading and writing, has effectively surpassed his teacher and his guardian through his superior use of literacy.

As is appropriate for stories published together in a volume, "The Celestial Omnibus" and "Other Kingdom" form a dialogue in which one answers the question posed by the other, namely, how it is possible to successfully negotiate between hyper-literacy and illiteracy, gaining the liberating cognitive benefits of literacy while avoiding the pitfall of using one's literacy—and one's possession of books—as a means to social advancement. Though Miss Beaumont and the boy have a natural inclination towards imaginative enjoyment of literature, neither is placed in a social position that enables her or him to take advantage of this active engagement with texts. Rather, as a woman and a child, respectively, each is tied to a predetermined code of behavior, dictated in the first

case by a fiancé and in the second by parents and elders. Their use of reading as an imaginative escape is thus doomed to failure, and results in the alienation of each from the life of the world. The failures of these characters to reach their full literate potential prefigure the more complex literate failure of Leonard Bast in Forster's *Howards End*. Indeed, the stories, with their neat allegorical conclusions, facilitated by the elements of fantasy and necessitated by the brevity of the short story form, provide a model for the reading of the more complex literate novels of Forster, including *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*. Perhaps because the novel allows for the development of more complex ideas, often without neat resolutions, the story "Other Kingdom" in particular succeeds where the novels fail by presenting a character who does indeed provide a successful model of the literate individual. Although *Howards End* includes a character who is analogous to Ford, he is detached from the reality of the other characters because of his removal to the university setting—a fact which might serve as a post-script to Ford's apparent success.

In the short fiction, however, as in the novels, the failures of literacy are perhaps more interesting than literacy's successes, as it is self-serving for a writer to praise the virtues of imaginative engagement with texts, however allegorical, mythological, or even tongue-in-cheek this praise may be. However, Forster's stories make a less expected gesture, but one more in line with the anxiety surrounding literate activity among intellectuals of the early twentieth century. In developing a theory about the proper uses of literacy, Forster condemns, through the models of Mr. Bons, Inskip, and Worters, utilitarian uses of literacy—specifically those uses that involve social advancement by

virtue of one's uses of the literate activities of reading and writing. Though the stories clearly privilege the innocent reader who approaches reading as an adventure, and though this innocent reader functions as a foil to the Bonses, the fates of the boy and Miss Beaumont serve as a kind of caution, that literate activity, approached too enthusiastically, perhaps, or with too pure an innocence, will devolve into pure escapism, resulting in the alienation of the individual; this perhaps has an analogue in Virginia Woolf's nonfiction, in which she condemns indiscriminate reading while seeking to redefine what is meant by reading "discriminately." Another possibility, explored more problematically in the novels—notably *Howards End*—is that one's social situation—one's inferior position with regard to the power structure, whether it be because of gender, age, or class—prohibits the imaginative enjoyment of literature in a material way. As this dilemma is unique in this study to Forster's fiction, it will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. In terms of the proposed genre of literacy fiction, the dilemma of the reader in society as revealed in Forster's fiction demonstrates the way in which scenes of reading may combine to form an overall literacy theme, which may then productively be discussed as a primary motivation for the novel or story.

### CHAPTER III

#### E. M. FORSTER AND THE LITERACY NOVEL

The themes of literacy that are articulated in so much detail in “The Celestial Omnibus” and “Other Kingdom” reappear throughout Forster’s novels, each of which contain some kind of scene of reading, though the importance of these scenes varies from novel to novel. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, for example, the reading of guidebooks to learn about Monteriano occupies a brief scene in which the reading habits of a mother and son are briefly noted, and these habits add to the overall characterization of these figures. However, while literate activity serves a significant function in this scene, themes of literacy are not pervasive in the work as a whole, and the culture of Monteriano would be better evaluated according to traits of an oral rather than literate culture, though literacy is indeed present.

In this chapter, I will address Forster’s treatment of literacy in his novels by examining scenes of literacy in *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*. Each of these novels contains scenes of reading that are essential to the action of the novel as a whole, and which combine to provide some kind of overall message about literate activity. Each story also adopts themes that are present in “The Celestial Omnibus” and “Other Kingdom,” such as the correct uses of and attitudes toward literate activity and the relationship between material wealth, social reality, and literate pursuits. In *A Room with a View*, the potential of the literate act to impact the events of the life-world is suggested, as it is in “Other Kingdom,” while the female protagonist’s literal reliance on

printed resources for her experience of the world is rejected as naïve and ultimately counterproductive. In *Howards End*, Forster examines the literacy of the poor, specifically, the obstacles that exist to the working man's pursuit of high culture through literacy. The exact value of the instinctual response to literature is a contested point in many of Forster's works. In *A Room with a View*, instinct is privileged over strict adherence to the literal meaning of books—particularly guidebooks—and the power of books to open the mind is shown to be dependant on the individual's level of reliance upon the literal meaning or social value of the text. In *Howards End*, Leonard Bast's approach to reading is tainted by his knowledge of cultural capital and other obstacles that distract him from either maintaining naïveté or achieving intellectual distance. He exists in a literate limbo, or perhaps a purgatory, instead of the literary heaven of "The Celestial Omnibus."

### ***A Room with a View***

In *A Room with a View*, as initially in "Other Kingdom," Forster focuses on a female character, the appropriateness of her uses of literacy, and the potential for literacy to deepen or retard her self-consciousness, depending on how the reading material is used, or to direct her actions. Though literacy may not at first seem to play a strong role in Part One of *A Room with a View*, the casual English tourist passing through Signiora Bertoli's Pension and the parts of Italy the English tourist frequents encounters a proliferation of reading material. Literacy thus forms a kind of backdrop to the events that take place in this section of the novel, even as it informs some of the more dramatic scenes of a character's interior conflict throughout the entire novel. One of Lucy's

initial impressions of the pension is a document on display, the “notice of the English church (Rev. Cuthbert Eager, M. A. Oxon)” (*RWAV* 3). Among the possessions that the others at the pension own or acquire are Mr. Beebe’s “philosophic diary” (*RWAV* 10) that he has composed and, later, his letters (*RWAV* 30), letters that Lucy receives from home (*RWAV* 45), in George’s room, “a sheet of paper on which was scrawled an enormous note of interrogation” (*RWAV* 11), Miss Lavish’s newspaper containing an account of the murder that Lucy witnesses with George (*RWAV* 38), the “books of varying thickness and size” with which Charlotte attempts to “pave” the trunk (*RWAV* 62). During an outing, several of the guests from the pension find themselves “in the newspaper room at the English bank” (*RWAV* 44). In addition to the reading materials, one also encounters littered literary and historical allusions: a portrait of “the late Poet Laureate” on the wall of the Pension (*RWAV* 3), “high discourse on Guelfs and Ghibellines” (*RWAV* 9) among the guests at the Pension, reference to the “Ponte alle Grazie” as “mentioned by Dante” (*RWAV* 13), references to Ruskin’s writings (*RWAV* 16, 20), and Mr. Emerson’s quotation from the poetry of A. E. Houseman (*RWAV* 21). Part of Mr. Emerson’s own infamy is his association with the Socialist Press (42). The other tourists in the Santa Croce have Baedekers (*RWAV* 16), and the followers of Mr. Eager’s church tour hold “prayer-books as well as guide books” (*RWAV* 19), suggesting that they lack spontaneity of temporal and spiritual experience. By contrast, the enlightened foreigner in Italy “never walked about with Baedekers,” but lived, instead, “in delicate seclusion, some in furnished flats, others in Renaissance villas on Fiesole’s slope. . . read, wrote, studied, and exchanged ideas, thus attaining to that intimate

knowledge, or rather perception, of Florence which is denied to all who carry in their pockets the coupons of Cook” (*RWAV* 40). While he scorns the less accomplished tourist who relies on a Baedeker, Mr. Eager represents this type of the intellectual elite abroad: one who does not experience Italy or know it (the narrative stresses the intimate “perception” over knowledge), but knows it as one knows a book—a book that one has learned to “understand” and “appreciate” after the fashion of Mr. Bons, mainly for the purpose of achieving the admiration of others from his own country.

Eager’s disregard for and detachment from the local Italians is typified by his regard for a book that he has torn—“a long glossy ribbon of churches, ribbons, and views” (*RWAV* 41), images that the man has for sale. Though this book contains images rather than words, Eager’s objectification of the “vulgar views” for sale is an indication of how he reads the Italians themselves; the fact that the pictures are contained within a book offers the opportunity for objectification. He scorns the impulsive, natural Italians, but does have some regard for those individuals who, like Mr. Bons in his youth, perhaps, or Inskip, “desire . . . education and social advance,” recognizing that “in these there is something not wholly vile” (*RWAV* 42).

The Baedeker *Handbook to Northern Italy* is the focal point of the literate activity in Part One, and represents both the practical utility of books and the danger of relying too heavily on surface impressions or factual information without filtering these through one’s own experience. Eager explicitly links the Baedeker to a shallowness of experience and lack of consciousness, lamenting the “poor tourists. . . handed about like a parcel of goods from Venice to Florence, from Florence to Rome, living herded



together in the pensions or hotels, quite unconscious of anything that is outside Baedeker” (*RWAV* 48). In the first mention of the Baedeker, Lucy, having missed the implications of her cousin Charlotte’s conversation about the Emersons, “was reduced to literature,” meaning the factual content of the Baedeker: “Taking up Baedeker’s *Handbook to Northern Italy*, she committed to memory the most important dates of Florentine History” (*RWAV* 10). She first relies on the book as an escape from conversation that is meaningless to her, but also uses it to find her way—both as a geographic and aesthetic guide.<sup>22</sup> Miss Lavish, the lady novelist who resides at the Pension, separates Lucy from the Baedeker, and initially seems to represent the more enlightened tourist. However, although she extemporizes on Italy, her conversation is limited to social and political circles in England. Nevertheless, she “hope[s] . . . [to] emancipate [Lucy] from Baedeker” as “[h]e does but touch the surface of things. As to the true Italy—he does not even dream of it. The true Italy is only to be found by patient observation” (*RWAV* 13). Similarly, the narrator in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* comments that when visiting Monteriano, “it is impossible, as well as sacrilegious, to be as quick as Baedeker” (*WAF* 20). Miss Lavish’s personification of the Baedeker emphasizes the separate existence of the Baedeker. It is an icon, but it is almost its own consciousness and motivating force, as Miss Lavish’s own novel will be in Part Two of *Room with a View*.

When Miss Lavish loses the way, she will not let Lucy consult the guide book:

““And no, you are not, not, *not* to look at your Baedeker. Give it to me; I shan’t let you

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<sup>22</sup> For example, the narrative voice, reflecting on Lucy’s mental state, describes her as having been “aesthetically inflated” before she lost the Baedeker (22).

carry it” (*RWAV* 15). She separates Lucy from the book physically, but because she also removes herself physically from Lucy, she cannot separate Lucy from her dependence on the information contained within the book. “Tears of indignation came to Lucy’s eyes—partly because Miss Lavish had jilted her, partly because she had taken her Baedeker” (*RWAV* 16). Later, upon encountering the Emersons, Lucy remarks that ““Miss Lavish has even taken away my Baedeker,”” to which Mr. Emerson responds that the “loss of a Baedeker” is “worth minding” (*RWAV* 18), implying that it is better to regret the loss of her guidebook than her human guide. Though their experience seems beyond what can be found in the book, the Emersons acknowledge Baedeker’s usefulness for navigation, and George recommends that without the Baedeker, she should join them (*RWAV* 18).

The Emersons represent spontaneity, if not intellectual enlightenment in the accepted sense—the impressions that can be gained without reference to guidebooks, and stand in contrast to Lucy’s reliance on the text. Abandoned by Miss Lavish, Lucy worries that no one will now be able to tell her at which frescoes by Giotto she gazes, though she is “capable of feeling what is proper” in the “presence of [their] tactile values” (*RWAV* 16). She has been stripped of her security and reliance on others, both for secondhand experience of Italy and the pretense of British conventionality. Though she is familiar with the writings of Ruskin, she is unable, without a textual or human guide, to connect her reading with the experience that is before her as she tours the “sepulchral slabs” within the church at Santa Croce (*RWAV* 16).

Lucy, primarily intent, during this excursion to the “outside,” on “acquiring information,” is “unwilling to be enthusiastic over monuments of uncertain authorship or date” (*RWAV* 16). Her demeanor indicates a certain disdain for poor recordkeeping, utter reliance on recorded factual information. When her experience begins to turn analytic in a small way rather than being based on memorized and repeated facts, she begins to enjoy her experiences. “She puzzled out the Italian notices—the notices that forbade people to introduce dogs into the church—the notice that prayed people, in the interest of health and out of respect to the sacred edifice in which they found themselves, not to spit” (*RWAV* 16). Although the information contained in them is mundane, the implication seems to be that the act of translation, an act that plays a significant role in “Other Kingdom,” represents a higher mental faculty, one that opens the mind to the true character of the experiences surrounding one. In this context, the Baedeker becomes less significant as a guide and more symbolic as a representation of the “wrong kind” of tourist experience. There is a kind of disdain for vulgarity in the observation that “[the tourists’] noses were as red as their Baedekers” (*RWAV* 16). Clearly, Lucy sees herself, just before her encounter with the Emersons, as removed from those who carry Baedeker. It is this liberation that allows her receptiveness to the Emersons and the intellectual freedom that they represent.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In the first chapter of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster reproduces a passage from Baedeker and gives contrasting character responses to the text. The conventional, unimaginative English matron Mrs. Herriton, who has “opened . . . for the first time in her life” the Baedeker on Central Italy, “was not one to detect the hidden charms of Baedeker. Some of the information seemed to her unnecessary, all of it was dull” (*WAF* 16). By contrast, her son Philip, who has been touched by Italy (albeit imperfectly), “could never read ‘The view from the Rocca (small gratuity) is finest at sunset’ without

Miss Lavish, who “represented intellect” at the Pension Bertolini (*RWAV* 29) uses literacy for her profession, as she is a novelist, though she is not shown *reading*, and one might presume that her writing suffers from this lack of study, being based too much on real life, without the artistry that should accompany writing as a creative pursuit—reality filtered through the creative mental faculties of the writer rather than reality merely recorded. Lucy, who will be deeply affected by Miss Lavish’s second attempt at an Italian novel in Part Two, is “awe-struck” by the news that Miss Lavish is writing a book. However, having left the first novel unattended in the “Grotto of the Calvary at the Capuccini Hotel at Amalfi while she went for a little ink,” Miss Lavish loses the novel, which the very proper Miss Alans describe as “not a very nice novel,” to the tide (*RWAV* 27). Thus, the reader is given a secondhand (and likely fictitious) oral account of a scene of misplaced literacy, or a mishap occurring during a literate process, which again emphasizes the lack of fixity of the supposedly permanent medium of writing while explaining why Miss Lavish turned to the habit of smoking. The “saddest thing of all” to Miss Alan is that Lavish “cannot remember what she has written” (*RWAV* 27), a testimony to the idea, traceable to Plato’s *Phaedrus*, that writing weakens the memory. However, this supposed failure of memory could also suggest that Miss Lavish

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a catching at the heart” (*WAF* 16-17). Mrs. Herriton has had to consult Baedeker because Byron and Twain fail to mention the village where her daughter-in-law will be married and she does not have the imagination necessary to extrapolate from the map of Italy. It is therefore suited to her that her reading of Baedeker should demonstrate a reliance on literal meaning while her son’s is deeper and filtered by experience, although he is so removed from the actual experience that he has to rely on the book to recreate it for him. A contrasting interpretation could be that Philip’s experience of Italy, though more enlightened than some, remains superficial, informed by the kind of descriptions that include reference to a gratuity. The significance of Philip’s reaction seems to be the fact that he endeavors to see Italy less prosaically.

has told Miss Alan an oral fiction (i.e. lie) about her literate activity, or that Miss Lavish has not had her mental faculties sufficiently sharpened by her literacy to be able to recreate her creative literate endeavor. Her superficiality is indicated by her reaction to the murder (and presumably Charlotte's account of Lucy's witnessing it) as ideal material for her novel, while Lucy, who is trying to internalize the experience, finds it to be "a muddle—queer and odd, the kind of thing one could not write down easily on paper" (*RWAV* 38). Lucy's own feeling that things that are muddled are less suitable for recording or less easily recorded on paper defies George's "interrogation point"—his written (though inarticulate) expression of his own internal questioning—while marking her return to a simplistic (hence, comforting) rather than analytic (and difficult, or troubling) use of literacy. She is moving away from cognitive awareness by shunning the act of writing, while Miss Lavish's writing demonstrates that writing is not necessarily indicative of higher cognitive activity.

Considering that it forms the central provocative image in Miss Lavish's novel and the central scene of literate activity in the book, the catalyst for Lucy's breaking of her engagement to Cecil and eventual marriage to George, it is ironic that Lucy blames her encounter with George Emerson among the violets on the fact that "he looked like someone in a book" (*RWAV* 58)—a comment reminiscent again of Dante's account of the dangers of romantic literature in the story of Paolo and Francesca, though the reading of the novel, which takes place in Part Two of the novel, takes place in England rather than Italy. George, who has had an unorthodox education, including "Byron. . . *A Shropshire Lad*. . . *The Way of All Flesh*. . . Gibbon. . . Schopenhauer, Nietzsche"

(*RWAV* 101) and his father's Socialist and atheist or agnostic ideas, is a thinker who is made unhappy by thinking, but who will one day want to live. The moment of his encounter with Lucy among the violets seems to mark the beginning of his desire to live, for which he does not rely on books, though a book inspires him to take a chance and seize a moment of life for himself. By contrast, George describes Lucy's fiancé Cecil as someone who "should know no one intimately," precisely because he objectifies all things the way he does books or pictures (*RWAV* 135-136). Lucy's brother Freddy similarly remarks that "[t]here are some chaps who are no good for anything but books," a description likely meant for Cecil that Cecil readily takes to himself (*RWAV* 138). Ironically, considering George's insinuation that he objectifies people as he does books, Cecil's concern for books does not extend to their material forms, as he is guilty of "taking a book out of the shelf and leaving it about to spoil" so that it becomes warped (*RWAV* 122)—a possible reference to the book's content or Lucy's state of mind after she hears its content. The same adjective is used to describe Lucy's mind, and what she has intentionally done to her mind, in the penultimate chapter of the novel (*RWAV* 158-159). From his commentary on the book's content in later passages, one can infer that Cecil objectifies the content of books by classification and the judgment of "taste," though he does not necessarily value the material object. Though his reading is "deep" in a sense, not superficial like the use of the Baedeker as a guidebook, it is the practiced, critical reading of one like Mr. Bons. He dismisses "all modern books" as "bad" because "everyone writes for money"<sup>24</sup> (*RWAV* 128) and focuses on the number of split

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<sup>24</sup> Compare Mr. Bons, who *reads* for *status*, or Cecil himself, whose educated bearing is

infinitives in the novel (*RWAV* 127), reading it for the purpose of mocking it and asserting his own superiority.

The other members of the Honeychurch family, though not aspiring to be educated in the way that Lucy does in order to be an intellectually fit partner for Cecil, hold opinions about books that present a contrast to the way that Cecil, the Emersons, and even Lucy regard books. The opinions of the Honeychurch family are shaped by the same social forces that direct these (arguably) intellectual elites, while Lucy aspires to a kind of academic capital, though one that is directed and regulated by her gender and her role as future or potential wife. Freddy, who is studying medicine, has an anxiety about his own relation to the system of academic capital. He fears (from examining their bookshelves) that the Emersons are “great readers” and regrets that, though they used to be on the same intellectual level, Lucy will improve herself (according to Cecil’s design) by “read[ing] all kinds of books” while he will be confined to “medical books,” which are “[n]ot books that you can talk about afterwards” (*RWAV* 102). Freddy’s reflection on the importance of conversing about books suggests that literate activities extend beyond the reading of the book, and include the conversations that follow reading. In a different context, the difference between Cecil and what Lucy aspires to become, and her mother and brother (though Lucy still includes herself as part of her family unit), is described in the narrative as a clash of two civilizations (*RWAV* 111).

Lucy’s mother, Mrs. Honeychurch, may perhaps be regarded as a more “enlightened” Philistine than the boy’s parents in “Celestial Omnibus.” She seems

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bound to his status.

genteel, perhaps a member of the landed gentry, and while not aspiring to high society or intellectualism, she does value material objects, including books, which rank with furniture as things to be collected and preserved<sup>25</sup> as marks of status, though this is understated. It is her concern for the book being left out that exposes Cecil's disregard for the book as material object (*RWAV* 122). However, she does hold in contempt those who would disregard traditional familial values in the name of literature and intellectualism. This is evident from her dislike of Cecil's snobbery toward herself, Freddy, and their social circle, and is also revealed, in a more specifically gendered way, in the narrator's commentary on Mrs. Honeychurch's attitude toward Mrs. Lavish and female novelists in general:

[F]or nothing roused Mrs. Honeychurch so much as literature in the hands of females. She would abandon every topic to inveigh against those women who (instead of minding their houses and their children) seek notoriety by print. Her attitude was, "If books must be written, let them be written by men"; and she developed it at great length. . . . (113)

Mrs. Honeychurch's phrasing, specifically her use of the conditional tense, reveals her indifference to literary production in general.

The most significant scene of reading in the novel occurs at the Honeychurch home with Cecil presiding and Lucy and George Emerson as unwilling players. Mrs.

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<sup>25</sup> This is implicit rather than explicit, as the book that Cecil neglects is from "Smith's library" (120).



Honeychurch and Charlotte Bartlett, very different guardians of social convention and propriety, are notably absent as the younger generation negotiate between intellectual elitism and the function of literature, as well as the role of passion and truth in one's social existence. Mr. Emerson, who has knowledge enough to claim academic capital but refuses to place anything above personal spiritual truth and actions derived from that truth, is present only in the person of his son. In this particular scene, life and literature become conflated as the author of the novel, Miss Lavish writing under a pseudonym, has taken as her subject the encounter between George Emerson and Lucy that occurs when they are in Italy. The novel-as-plot-device is conspicuous, first of all, because it draws attention to what the reader has already read and, implicitly, the act of reading it; it is, in fact, a novel within a novel taking as its subject something that occurred in the novel. That the writer of the fictitious novel is a character within Forster's novel writing under a pseudonym emphasizes the ability of the printed word to conceal its author or source. The parallelism of the two love scenes also points to the structure of novels as a written rather than oral form.

The reading of the fictitious novel provokes action from Forster's characters in the manner of Dante's Paolo and Francesca, providing for the climax of the plot and for their (eventual) romantic union. In the example from Dante, the lovers Paolo and Francesca are damned because of their adulterous encounter, inspired by their shared reading of the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere, which is described in intimate terms (Dante Canto V, 70). The reading of Miss Lavish's book, which inspires George Emerson to repeat his embrace of Lucy and ushers Lucy into a personal hell described

by Forster as a “muddle,” takes place in a much less intimate setting. The would-be lovers are not alone, but are surrounded by Freddy Honeychurch and Minnie Bebe as well as Lucy’s fiancé Cecil. Since the lovers are in a muddle, it is the “offending” book instead of the scene that is described in sensual terms: “[T]he book lies motionless, to be caressed all the morning by the sun and to raise its covers slightly, as though acknowledging the caress” (*RWAV* 121).

Cecil, who has been reading the book *Under the Loggia*, more from boredom and arrogance than for enjoyment or self-improvement, finds that the “novel he was reading was so bad that he was obliged to read it aloud to others” (*RWAV* 127). While the others are engaged in a more communal game of tennis, Cecil reads aloud, transferring an interior, silent, solitary act to an ostensibly social activity. However, though reading aloud might seem to function communally, Cecil’s goal is not to share the story, but rather, to demonstrate his own superior intelligence and to win Lucy’s attention away from the game and the others playing it, including her brother and George Emerson. Cecil’s reading highlights the difference between his use of reading as a leisure pursuit and Lucy’s leisure reading: “[s]he no longer read novels herself, devoting all her spare time to solid literature in the hope of catching Cecil up. It was dreadful how little she knew, and even when she thought she knew a thing, like the Italian painters, she found she had forgotten it” (*RWAV* 122). Lucy reads in order to educate herself to become closer to Cecil’s intellectual equal, not to gain her share of academic capital, but in order to be worthy to share in his, as his wife in the manner of Harcourt Worters’ intentions for Miss Beaumont.

Cecil's reading reinforces his own solitary nature rather than connecting him with others, and the particular book he has chosen to read aloud will cause the loss of his fiancée and further alienation. While "Freddy and Mr. Floyd were obliged to hunt for a lost ball in the laurels, [Lucy and George] acquiesced," agreeing to listen. Cecil's act of reading, though he intends to read "an absurd account of a view" rather than a love scene, provokes action from George that will eventually unite George and Lucy. The book itself rather than Cecil's reading is credited with causing the "mischief": "The book, as if it had not worked mischief enough, had been forgotten and Cecil had to go back for it; and George, who loved passionately, must blunder against her in the narrow path" (*RWAV* 131). The reader will already be familiar with Cecil's neglect of the book; however, the narrative suggests that it was because of the book's own agency that Lucy, "for the second time, was kissed by [George Emerson]" (*RWAV* 131). This is later reinforced by George himself, who says that the "book made him" kiss Lucy (*RWAV* 136).

In *A Room With a View*, as in much of his fiction, Forster plays with narrative in a way that draws attention to the nature of text as something that cannot be manipulated and yet manipulates others, including the actual reader. While not "inton[ing] 'dear reader'" (Ong 103) in the manner of Nineteenth-century novelists who seem uncomfortable with the impersonal relationship between reader and writer and whose experience of storytelling is sufficiently close to orality that they seek to recreate the voice of a companion storyteller, Forster's narrative voice does provide commentary on the plot action in the form of direct address to the reader. Often, however, the effect of

this narrative technique is to draw attention to the difference between life as it is lived and life as it appears when written into the story. In *A Room with a View*, Forster makes the reader conscious that the status of “reader” is a privileged position in relation to the characters in the novel, particularly Lucy. Rather than commenting directly on the action of the story, as a traditional “intrusive” narrator would do, Forster’s narrator comments on the inferences that the reader should make from the action and narrative of the text. Specifically, the narrator reveals how the reader should understand Lucy’s actions and psychological response to her engagement to Cecil and encounters with George Emerson:

It is obvious enough for the reader to conclude, “She loves young Emerson.” A reader in Lucy’s place would not find it obvious. Life is easy to chronicle, but bewildering to practice, and we welcome “nerves” or any other shibboleth that will cloak our personal desire. She loved Cecil; George made her nervous; will the reader explain to her that the phrases should have been reversed? (116)

This passage, in stressing the difference between life and the written account, suggests one of the features of writing that Ong mentions in *Orality and Literacy*: writing facilitates analysis. Because the reader is able to conclude what Lucy can not by analyzing the text, which is necessarily easier to analyze than life as it is being lived, the (implied) reader is privileged in the textual construct that includes the characters, narrator, and reader. However, the reader is also powerless to affect the outcome of the

narrative. The appeal of the narrator is recognized as a futile one: the reader, though possessing knowledge beyond that of the characters, is constrained by the text and is unable to clarify for Lucy based on this knowledge, as the narrator entreats. This passage serves, therefore, as an ironic gesture emphasizing the text-ness of the text and the qualities of text—the distancing from events that permits analysis, as well as the fixed nature of the words and the events that occur, which render the words and actions impermeable. In a similarly “literate” gesture, the narrator invites the reader to rescan a passage in which Lucy speaks to Miss Bartlett, noting that, “The reader may have detected an unfortunate slip in it” (120). Although it is possible, as the narrator suggests, that Miss Bartlett did not detect the slip, it is equally possible that the actual (not implied) reader did not detect the slip. However, because the passage is fixed in print, the reader, unlike Miss Bartlett, may rescan the passage for clarification. The reader thus becomes aware of the act of reading and its principle characteristics as well as, in some cases, the advantages and disadvantages of reading over living. Forster stops short of privileging reading over living, however, as the examples of the boy from “The Celestial Omnibus” and, arguably, Lucy, Cecil and George, make clear. Similarly, in *Howards End*, Leonard Bast’s attempts at vicarious living or transcendence through books exposes the pitfalls of literacy in the life of one who can in no way benefit socially from literacy.

### ***Howards End***

In *Howards End*, Forster revisits the issues of intellectual life and social class that are implicit in “The Celestial Omnibus,” this time introducing the struggling poor, whom the narrator ironically names “unthinkable” (*HE* 38), in addition to the upper class reader and the bourgeoisie. Leonard Bast, who typifies the poor man desiring to improve intellectually, suffers economic hardship, humiliation, and finally death as a result of his contact with the intellectual Schlegel sisters, the blue-bloods of academic capital, whose impractical philanthropy theorizes the literacy of the poor in society. The Schlegels, Helen and Margaret, might be considered members of an intellectual aristocracy. Like the “cultural nobility” mentioned by Bourdieu, the Schlegels have inherited an intellectual tradition—specifically, the *German* intellectual tradition—from their father, who has also left them, as material capital, books.

In *Literature of Crisis, 1910-1922*, Anne Wright treats all 3 character groupings or families as middle class, but makes some useful distinctions. The philistine Wilcoxes are the “Edwardian plutocracy” (Wright 27) those who have forged the Empire by investment and sustain England by their wealth. The Schlegels, not as wealthy as the Wilcoxes, are yet not upper class—they are the humanitarian intellectuals. “In *Howards End* the moneyed classes divide into the Wilcox plutocracy, who make money, and the Schlegel intellectuals, who worry about it” (Wright 46). Leonard Bast occupies the ambiguous position of clerk: not a member of the working class, he is still extremely poor. According to Wright, “the clerk was in a curious position with respect to class and the distribution of earned income. Addressed as ‘Mr’ by his employer,” as well as by

other clerks, as shown in the meeting between Mr. Bast and Mr. Dealtry, “unlike the domestic servant or the factory worker—he was at the lower edge of the middle classes, with aspirations of upward social mobility. But his salary was lower than the better paid skilled manual worker. This anomaly of status and salary entailed social and economic pressures, and intensified job-insecurity” (Wright 49). Forster addresses this phenomenon directly by commenting that “in the brightly colored civilizations of the past [Leonard] would have had a definite status, his rank and his income would have corresponded” (*HE* 39); instead, Leonard faces the burden of status, the obligation “to assert gentility” without income (*HE* 39).

Although they have a tenuous relationship with the written word, the Wilcox family deserves mention as one of the two families on whom the action of the book centers, and represents a type found elsewhere in Forster’s works. The family as a whole resembles the family Worters in “The Other Kingdom.” In particular, the Wilcoxes share with the Worters a utilitarian view of literature and Art. The Wilcoxes believe, specifically, that “Art and literature, except when conducive to strengthening the character, [are] nonsense” (*HE* 20). Furthermore, they reject the female intellectual as sentimental and unstable: “Equality was nonsense; Votes for women nonsense” (*HE* 20); “to [Mr. Wilcox] steadiness included all praise” (*HE* 77). Mr. Wilcox, upon meeting Helen and Margaret Schlegel after his wife’s death and a lapse of “several weeks” (*HE* 111), feels pleased to have “an amiable but academic woman on either flank,” the mild objection noted in the narrative revealing Wilcox’s disapproval of intellectualism in general, as neither he nor his son care for mental ability beyond

business, and female intellectualism as embodied by the Schlegels. “They are as clever as you make ‘em, but unpractical” (*HE* 127); in Wilcox’s opinion, the two facts appear to be wedded. The Wilcoxes are characterized exclusively by material capital. Rather than pretending to possess knowledge of (or at least owning volumes of) Shelley, in the manner of the boy’s parents in “Celestial Omnibus,” a Wilcox would dismiss the value of cultural capital entirely. That Mr. Wilcox marries Margaret Schlegel, however, indicates that he feels a faint attraction to her moderated intellectualism, as long as she maintains his practical superiority and his status as her husband. Specifically,

Her cleverness gave him no trouble, and, indeed, he liked to see her reading poetry or something about social questions; it distinguished her from the wives of other men. He had only to call, and she clapped the book up and was ready to do what he wished. (*HE* 221)

Margaret’s acquiescence to her husband likely stems from her deeply empathetic nature and her will to teach him to feel emotions through reaching him on his own level. It is perhaps because she can not reach Leonard Bast on his own level—either because of his resistance, the class difference that separates them, or her own emotional attachments to Henry and Helen—that her empathy toward Leonard becomes dulled by the end of the novel.

The Schlegels, of a mixed German and English heritage that is embodied by Margaret, who is more conflicted than her sister Helen or her brother Tibby about the



necessary balance between German idealism and English practicality, have a complicated inheritance from their father, an intellectual Prussian expatriate. Considering their status as *female* intellectuals, Helen and Margaret<sup>26</sup> are different from characters found elsewhere in Forster's works though they share an affinity with some of the male intellectuals. In *A Room With a View*, they resemble not Lucy, who is not an intellectual, but George Emerson, whose intellectualism is spontaneous, though they differ from him because their intellectualism is not in crisis—they do not pursue the giant interrogation mark.<sup>27</sup> Cecil, who is also an intellectual of a sort, is more presumptuous and arrogant than any of the Schlegels, though it is interesting to note a “Mr. Vyse” among Tibby's acquaintances at Oxford (*HE* 93), a possible reference to Cecil's character in the earlier novel. “Other Kingdom” provides closer models for the Schlegels. One might imagine that, had her education continued, Miss Beaumont would have come to resemble the Schlegels,<sup>28</sup> with a more carefree idealism than that of Margaret, who is concerned with practical things. Her spontaneity might approach Helen's, though her sympathies would likely not extend to Helen's cultural and material philanthropy, for which Miss Beaumont has no context. The other intellectuals in “Other Kingdom” are Inskip, the opportunistic narrator, and Ford, who is cynical towards Worters and in love with Miss Beaumont. Margaret's practicality is too

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<sup>26</sup> Hereafter, “the Schlegels” will refer to Helen and Margaret unless context suggests otherwise, as Tibby does not enter significantly into the action of the novel.

<sup>27</sup> Early in the novel, Helen Schlegel seems to embody George Emerson's philosophy of life, which is based on the principle of acting on one's feelings.

<sup>28</sup> It is appropriate to note, once again, that Miss Beaumont is Irish (though her name is French) situated in an English context. By comparison, the Schlegels are transplanted Germans.

innocent and idealistic to be called opportunism and, unlike Inskip, she does not use her literacy for material gain. Though Ford is more cynical than either Helen or Margaret (perhaps masculine trait in Forster's writing), they, like him, are steadfastly attached to their ideals. The scene with Ford at the end of "Other Kingdom," alone and finding fulfillment in his reading, presents a picture similar to that of Tibby at Oxford. Unlike the women, who must negotiate a place within society, the men are able to isolate themselves with their books within a university setting.

The Schlegels inherit from their father not the reading of specific books, but the books themselves, and, more importantly, the ability and will to read books: "Chairs, tables, pictures, books, that had rumbled down to them through the generations, must rumble forward again. . . But there were all her father's books—they never read them, but they were their father's, and they must be kept" (*HE* 127). That they also inherit the literate act and a way of regarding that act is evident from Margaret's censure of Leonard Bast's reading: "His brain is filled with the husks of books, culture—horrible; we want him to wash out his brain and go to the real thing" (*HE* 124). The Schlegels want Leonard, who has no context for doing so, to experience literature spontaneously, in the manner of the boy in "The Celestial Omnibus" rather than Mr. Bons. They fail to realize what Leonard stands to gain from literacy and learning—namely, transcendence if not mobility—and what obstacles stand in the way of his pursuit of culture. Finally, the Schlegels' misguided philanthropy and idealization of Leonard leave him destroyed—financially and physically—and when they look back on him, it is with the condescension of financially secure intellectuals.

The literacy conflicts of the novel center on a few scenes involving the Schlegels and Leonard Bast. Many of these, while not “scenes of reading,” are scenes *based on* reading, narrative representations of the process of reading or the products of literate activity. Similarly, in the “The Celestial Omnibus,” the boy’s journey is not a literal scene of reading, but because of its allegorical representation of reading, it may be discussed as a “scene of literate activity.” The most notable such scene depicts Leonard’s meeting of the Schlegels at the concert and the social interaction immediately following. Leonard’s attendance at the concert illustrates his desire for mental activity and intellectual development. It is because of his conversation with Margaret Schlegel, which is *literate* discourse—informed, on some level, by the acquisition of knowledge through books—that Bast’s thoughts on his desire for intelligent conversation enter the narrative. After Helen inadvertently “pinches” Mr. Bast’s umbrella, the narrative catches his desire for education, which, to Leonard, will transform his speech as well. Leonard’s wish to transform the matter of his speech suggests a comparison to D. H. Lawrence’s protagonists, who consciously transform the manner of their speech—both accent and vocabulary—through education (reading) in order to disguise their class origins. Leonard rhapsodizes silently: “If only he could talk like this, he would have caught the world. Oh, to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well-informed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started!” (*HE* 34). Here, “lady” refers to class as well as gender, as he clearly does not regard his Jacky as a “lady.”

Leonard laments his late start in the acquisition of culture, which he describes primarily as a literate act or pursuit. To gain the ability to engage in cultural discourse “would take one years” (*HE* 34). Contrasting his situation with that of the privileged classes as he asks, “With an hour at lunch and a few shattered hours in the evening, how was it possible to catch up with leisured women, who had been reading steadily from childhood?” (*HE* 34). The conversational gap, with its roots in Leonard’s lack of education, is linked to divisions of class through possession—or lack—of leisure. For a working man, reading was necessarily an activity for leisure time, since presumably his job—even the job of a clerk—requires only functional literacy rather than significant literate acts. In *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence depicts a young man who is able to advance in the workplace by virtue of his literacy, but Bast is incapable of doing so. Instead, his pursuits of culture acquaint him with the Schlegels, who, through misguided financial advice, cause Leonard’s financial ruin.

Leonard describes his inability to converse in terms that seem to mix oral and literate—he describes a syntactical failure, speaking literally of sentence construction while also implying the unique syntax of social communication, to which he is unable to conform because of his lack of reading: “His brain might be full of names, he might even have heard of Monet and Debussy; the trouble was that he could not string them together into a sentence, he could not make them ‘tell’ . . .” (*HE* 34). Leonard’s failure to “make [the names] ‘tell’” is that he lacks the syntax of social interaction—a product of both lack of education and his low social standing—and, finally of intellectual development. He is unable to form the information that he collects into a conceptual

whole, here represented by the names—mere words—that “he could not string . . . together into a sentence” (*HE* 34). He reads, but without direction (or the boy’s instinct or imagination) he is unable to make coherent sense of what he reads. The inability to put information into a conceptual whole foreshadows Leonard’s final thought as he is buried beneath the Schlegels’ inherited books: “Nothing had sense” (*HE* 277).

At this point in the scene, the narrator seems to adopt the voice of Leonard’s consciousness, though the third person narration is maintained. It is Leonard’s consciousness, then, that informs the reader that “he could not string [the names] together into a sentence.” Sentence formation presumably occurs in the mind before it is translated into spoken or written language, but Leonard is conscious of the act of sentence formation. This conscious awareness of sentence formation renders an unconscious oral act literate, since it is when sentences become visual that they are more easily examined and analyzed. The awareness of language suggested by Leonard’s self-critique parallels Leonard’s contemplation of written composition in a scene of reading in his flat. However, the concept of making the information “tell” implies speech rather than writing, indicating a shift between or blending of spoken and written language and a failure to successfully negotiate the two as separate media. Leonard is literate, but his contexts are oral. His discourse is informed by orality rather than literacy, and finally, he “[can] not quite forget about his stolen umbrella” (*HE* 34).

As Leonard returns to his flat after the encounter with the Schlegels, the reader learns that Leonard has sacrificed his daily paper to attend this concert, and so put himself at a disadvantage with the members of his own class:

“Very serious thing this decline of the birth-rate in Manchester.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Very serious thing this decline of the birth-rate in Manchester,” repeated Mr. Cunningham, tapping the Sunday paper in which the calamity in question had just been announced to him.

“Ah, yes,” said Leonard, who was not going to let on that he had not bought a Sunday paper. (*HE* 40)

Because he has not bought a paper, he is unable to respond adequately, responding to the grave news that “[i]f this kind of thing goes on the population of England will be stationary in 1960,” with a weak “You don’t say so” (*HE* 40). He has not read the correct material, so he is not well informed and lacks the ability to discourse on a topic introduced by a male colleague—his social (perhaps intellectual) equal. Even the newspaper, then, has its place within social interaction—again, something Lawrence discusses or rails against—and Leonard has fallen behind. Having rejected low culture (the newspaper) for what he perceives to be high culture (the concert) he has distanced himself from the familiar while failing to find a sufficient replacement. Like the boy in “The Celestial Omnibus,” Leonard risks being removed from the sphere of everyday existence and compromises his chance of return.

Leonard retires to his rooms immediately after discussing the paper he has not read to read his chosen text, Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice*, which has again been chosen

based on others' ideas of cultural value. The scene which follows, the only portrayal of the act of reading in the novel, reveals Leonard's autodidactic method and the obstacles to his reading at home. He has chosen Ruskin as his tutor, as Lucy has chosen Ruskin as a guide to the tombs of Santa Croce (*RWAV* 16, 20). The narration reveals how "Leonard was trying to form his style on Ruskin: he understood him to be the greatest master of English Prose. He read forward steadily, occasionally making a few notes" (*HE* 42). The choice of Ruskin is not based on personal preference; rather, he relies on received wisdom—one wonders from whom it was received—that Ruskin is the "greatest master of English prose." From the Schlegels, as from "The Celestial Omnibus," one might infer that reading choice must be individualized. In a moment that gives Leonard "piercing joy", Margaret, in response to Leonard's desperate list of authors he has read and wishes to discuss, says, "So *you* like Carlyle" (*HE* 120). Margaret assumes that if he is reading an author, or proposing him as a subject for discussion, it must be based on personal preference. She does not realize that Leonard has insufficient imagination or instinct to make such a judgment; rather, all books still seem beyond his likes and dislikes—all culturally valued works are fit subjects for his study. By contrast, the books that the Schlegels have received as physical possessions from their father are emblematic of their intellectual heritage, but are not books that they have chosen to read. As hereditary intellectuals, they have choices, and are allowed likes and dislikes by their superior interiority, gained through extensive reading. Books are the servants of the educated and leisured classes, while for Leonard, books are his masters.

In choosing the books that quite literally become his schoolmasters, Leonard feels that he must conform not only to a culturally constructed idea of what he should read, but also to the specific features that others value in the works themselves. Thus, the reader finds Leonard asking himself of a famous line of Ruskin's, "Was there anything to be learned from this fine sentence? Could he adapt it to the needs of daily life? Could he introduce it, with modifications, when he next wrote a letter to his brother, the lay-reader?" (*HE* 42). The term "lay-reader" has two meanings, both of which were also relevant when Forster was writing. As a profession, the position of "lay-reader" in the Anglican church is that of "a layman licensed to conduct religious services" (OED); in the absence of a deacon, the lay-reader, who is licensed but not ordained, may perform some of the religious duties or liturgical functions of a deacon.<sup>29</sup> By contrast with his brother's liturgical position, Leonard is a lay-reader in the more common use of the term, "a reader of a book, etc., on a subject of which he has no professional or specialist knowledge" (OED). Leonard, who is not a specialist on any subject, is necessarily acting as a lay-reader as he attempts to educate himself. His brother's position as a spiritual director is also presented as an ironic contrast to Leonard's lack of educational direction and imperviousness to spiritual experience. The boy in "The Celestial Omnibus," a spiritual figure himself, is not consciously trying to improve himself; he knows only what he enjoys. Thus, he finds freedom. By contrast,

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<sup>29</sup> The function of lay-readers in the contemporary Anglican and Episcopalian churches may be found on individual dioceses' web pages, for example, the Episcopal Diocese of Albany, New York, in their Canons of the Diocese, or in individual parishes' descriptions of their ministries, such as that of Trinity Anglican Church in the Diocese of the Missouri Valley. See diocese web pages for details.



enjoyment in reading is not part of Leonard's scheme, which is perhaps why he is denied spiritual fulfillment. He thrills when he feels that common ground is established between himself and the Schlegels, but is unable to judge his likes and dislikes because he feels indebted to the authors and works that he reads. Great literature, to him, is unquestionably great. Leonard has listened to Mr. Bons.

Leonard seems to follow Freud's description of those who "fend off suffering" through the "sublimation of instincts" gained by "heighten[ing] the yield of pleasure from the sources of psychical and intellectual work" (*CD* 29). However, the suffering he must overcome is considerable, and proves a significant obstacle to his self-education, which is a necessary intermediate step toward intellectual pleasure. In Helen's terms, Leonard "is married to a wife whom he doesn't seem to care for much. He likes books, and what one may roughly call adventure, and if he had a chance—but he is so poor. He lives a life where all money is apt to go on nonsense and clothes" (*HE* 113). Forster gives the reader a portrait of Leonard's life that focuses on his inability to study—from his pedantic methods to his daily interruptions, including his greatest burden, his intended wife Jacky. He must make sacrifices for his experiences of high culture, as in the case of his Sunday newspaper (*HE* 40). During the scene of Leonard's reading at home, he is initially interrupted by Jacky's arrival at their shared flat. During this extended interruption of Leonard's only scene of reading in the novel, the dialogue between Jacky and Leonard serves to illustrate how living with Jacky provides both a motive for Leonard's study and an obstacle to it.

The book he is reading when the reader is privileged to see him at his home is Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*, his approach to which allows the reader to recognize, with the Schlegels, the faults in his methods. While he "reads forward steadily," and with great seriousness, "occasionally making a few notes," he reads not in the spirit of discovery, as in a nighttime walk or an omnibus ride, but with seriousness, reverence, and awe. He does not question and try to form his mind according to his logic-driven responses to the material, he merely tries to form himself in the image of his masters. In response to his own pedagogical question, whether "he [could] adapt [Ruskin's fine sentence] to the needs of daily life," and "introduce it, with modifications, when he next wrote a letter" (*HE* 42), he transforms Ruskin's appreciation of a cathedral to a critique of his flat. While this does require mental exercise of a sort, the reader is left with the ridiculous incongruence resulting from this misappropriation of high discourse. Leonard realizes this incongruence: "Something told him that the modifications would not do; and that something, had he known it, was the spirit of English Prose. 'My flat is dark as well as stuffy.' Those were the words for him" (*HE* 42). Here, "spirit of English Prose" might refer to English Prose as an entity—an apparition or other inaccessible presence, or the essence, or elemental nature of English Prose. In either case, Leonard is aware of it instinctually, though he can only refer to "something."

The narrator, in describing Leonard's continued reading in Ruskin, recounts the delights Leonard experiences; however, the narrative voice also acknowledges the way in which Ruskin "elud[es] all that was actual and insistent in Leonard's life" (*HE* 42). Because the "voice" in Ruskin's prose "had never been dirty or hungry, and had not

guessed successfully what dirt and hunger are” (*HE* 42), it can not speak to him as an equal and, presumably, it can not teach him. Unlike Leonard, this is an upper class intellect and a more spiritual being who is not troubled by the insistence of the physical. Rather than being able to find himself in the work, “Leonard felt that he was being done good to” and that he will “come to Culture suddenly” as with a religious conversion, if he persists in his reverent reading (*HE* 43). Here, Forster places at least part of the failure of Leonard’s self-education with his reading material. Though chosen carefully by Leonard according to received notions of high culture and literary excellence, Ruskin is, by implication, not suitable for Leonard’s education. In isolation, modified by Leonard as a learning exercise or contrasted with Forster’s own easy prose style, the pomposity of Ruskin’s style is revealed. As the prose is “doing good to” Leonard, it is also “(for of the shafts enough has been said already)” talking down to Leonard and perhaps more sophisticated readers as well. This idea is reinforced by Margaret Schlegel’s comment: “So *you* like Carlyle” (*HE* 120) the original emphasis suggesting an incredulous response.

Leonard sees both written and oral language as keys to this “life of the mind,” though the conversation he desires is literate conversation—proceeding from literate minds and based on texts that they have in common. Leonard attempts to educate himself, becoming acquainted with books for the purpose of discussing them with others. His verbal interaction with Jacky, reminiscent of a vignette from *The Waste Land*,<sup>30</sup> throws into sharp contrast his inability to find mental stimulation at home. Her

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<sup>30</sup> Wright also makes this comparison. See p. 53.

conversation is contradictory and repetitive: having said she was not “out,” she confesses that she was “out to tea at a lady friend’s” (*HE* 44). After remarking that she is tired, the next four exchanges reiterate that he and she are tired. Similarly, Leonard’s remark that he has met an acquaintance produces dull, repetitive babble:

. . . ‘I met Mr. Cunningham outside, and we passed a few remarks.’

‘What, not Mr. Cunningham?’

‘Yes.’

‘Oh, you mean Mr. Cunningham.’

‘Yes, Mr. Cunningham.’ (*HE* 44)

In the same repetitive manner, most of their exchanges center on Leonard’s affirmation of his affection for Jacky in response to her insistent questions, “You do love me?” and “You will make it right?” (*HE* 45). If Jacky’s speech provides an obstacle to his intellectual pursuits (however lacking), her body provides a greater obstacle. His bookmark (Margaret Schlegel’s card) falls to the floor as Jacky, much larger than Leonard, sits on his lap and seizes his book in an attempt to commandeer his attention (*HE* 44). Jacky provides the culmination of Leonard’s problem with the physical that characterizes and inhibits his mental life.

What Leonard Bast seems to desire from literacy is a mental life that takes him away from the physical demands of day-to-day life—physical demands that include material needs such as clothing, shelter and food, as well as sexual desire. The

consequences of sexual desire and the waning of that desire are represented by Jacky and her neurotic fear that she will be abandoned as a ruined woman rather than validated through marriage. Clearly, Jacky does not fulfill Leonard's need for a developed mental life, which is what he seeks from the Schlegel sisters—the opportunity for learned conversation rather than the paranoid repetition that characterizes life—and speech—with Jacky. Leonard is “one of the thousands who have lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit” (*HE* 98), which is the boy's heaven in “The Celestial Omnibus,” mainly through the insistence of physical needs. Physical concerns belong to the poorer classes in general, as Cunningham's concern with the birth rate demonstrates. In Leonard's case, his physical concerns distance him from his attempts at a mental life, and even when the two might be fed simultaneously, his suspicions of the Schlegels' good will in inviting him to tea (reminiscent of Eliza Doolittle's suspicions of Professor Higgins) lead him to reject their offer of tea and intellectual discourse. Paranoia, in this case, the fear of losing the few material items one possesses, prevents his acceptance of tea and conversation, both the objects of his hunger (*HE* 39). As he has missed the opportunity to satisfy both hungers, the description of “[h]is mind and his body . . . [being] alike underfed” (*HE* 39) suggests a correlation between the two problems. The reasons for these underfeedings are “because he was poor, and because he was modern,” so his mind and body are “always craving better food” (*HE* 39). Being poor causes his physical hunger, while it also prevents his association with intellectuals.

In the place of intellectual company and discourse, Leonard has Jacky. The details of their acquaintance are not clarified, perhaps, as some critics would argue,

because Forster keeps the reader at arms' length from the poor, Leonard and Jacky in particular.<sup>31</sup> However, what *is* clear is that Jacky was a ruined woman before she met Leonard, because of her relationship with Mr. Wilcox, perhaps other men also. Also, because they are sharing a flat and because Leonard feels that it is a matter of honor for him to "make it alright" by marrying Jacky, the reader assumes an illicit sexual relationship between Jacky and Leonard that has not been sanctioned or validated by family or society. It is presumably, then, a *physical*, sexual indiscretion that has led to his obligations to Jacky. Her body becomes a literal obstacle between Leonard and his book, as she sits on Leonard's knee, "a massive woman of thirty-three . . . [whose] weight hurt him" (*HE* 44), a physical manifestation of the obstacle her body creates for Leonard.

Leonard has no expectation that literacy will raise his situation in life, nevertheless he pursues it. In his treatment of Leonard's desires, Forster must answer the question of whether literate intellectual activity is capable of living up to Leonard's expectations. The answer hints at why Leonard's attempts at self-improvement seem cruelly comic in the novel. The narrative action and the narrative voice suggest that Leonard's efforts are misguided. As he rises to make supper, he reviews his family's opposition to his proposed marriage to Jacky and his feeling that she distrusts his

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<sup>31</sup> For a general discussion of Forster's distancing of the poor throughout his fiction, see Wilfred Stone, "'Overleaping Class': Forster's Problem in Connection" (1978). In "Ambiguous Connections: Leonard Bast's Role in *Howards End*" (1985), Mary Pinkerton discusses the ways in which Forster depersonalizes the Basts, including revisions which substitute impersonal pronoun references and articles for more "connected" syntax, a reversal, Pinkerton notes, that stands in contrast to his revision trends involving other characters in the novel.

intentions. His pursuit of literature and the arts provides compensation, and perhaps validation, for his opposition to the wills of those around him and the expectations of society, though this opposition does not in itself provide fulfillment. Acknowledging his inability to become the intellectual or social equals of the Schlegels, whom he has just met, he is forced to conclude, as with his failed attempt to replicate Ruskin's prose, that "[s]ome are born cultured; the rest had better go in for whatever comes easy" (*HE* 47). However, Leonard is not a very likable character in general. If one takes his desire for self-improvement, which is admirable, and examine the ludicrous methods by which he strives to accomplish this self-improvement, the two cancel each other. His obsession with the umbrella undermines his desire for culture—the two do not seem compatible; if the conflict is between material and spiritual in Leonard's case, the material, represented by the umbrella or Jacky, ultimately wins.

Print implicates the Schlegels in Jacky's search for her husband; Margaret's calling card alerts Jacky to the meeting between Leonard and the Schlegels, which she interprets according to her own (illicit) experiences—ironically, according to what will happen between Helen and Leonard in the future. It is the quality of print that it is separated from the human life-world that allows Jacky's mistake and the encounter to occur—because the context in which it was presented to Leonard is no longer attached to the card, this misinterpretation occurs and because the name remains, the card may be traced to its source. The Schlegels' initial interest in Leonard is charity combined with the perception of Leonard as a curiosity—a member of the lower middle class trying to achieve high culture. They would like to see him reach what they perceive to be his

goal, almost as a *Pygmalion*-like experiment.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, their interest is based on Leonard's epic walk, though their interest in his walk resembles the interest an intellectual might have in a book rather than the interest one person shows in another, suggesting Forster's recurring concern that books influence an intellectual tendency to objectify people, the poor in particular. The Schlegels' print-based encounter with Jacky leads to the discussion of Leonard's print-based adventure. Margaret is condescending in her appraisal of Leonard, whom she characterizes as having "vague aspirations. . . mental dishonesty . . . familiarity with the outsides of books" (*HE* 98). It is his action rather than his contemplation that finally attract the Schlegels' interest in Leonard—or in his "adventure."

Leonard's "journey," or "adventure," is simply a walk. He has walked at night under the stars, while people slept, with disregard for his obligations. However, he attributes this to literature. Leonard seems to be inspired by books in which the characters "get back to the earth"; he mentions *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, Stevenson's *Prince Otto* and *Virginibus*, and E. V. Lucas's *Open Road* (100). Leonard describes these as "beautiful books," while Helen, and Tibby groan over his lack of literary discretion (much like Mr. Bons in "The Celestial Omnibus"). However, these books have given Leonard an evening of transcendence—not intellectual or spiritual transcendence, but transcendence born of activity, a change of scenery, and physical

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<sup>32</sup> Helen is more cruel or impersonal in her experiment than Shaw's Professor Higgins, however. Rather than following through with her experiment, she abandons Leonard, though this is necessarily complicated by her pregnancy. Finally, the sisters can treat Leonard with condescension before and after his death, reinforcing their social and intellectual distance.



discomfort. His transcendence, like his obstructions and like the concerns of his class, is born of the body rather than the soul. Leonard, conscious of his discomfort, has noticed that the dawn is not a beautiful sight as it appears to the writers, readers, and characters of books (102). Leonard's journey is like the boy's in "The Celestial Omnibus" in that he uses books as a medium to transcend the everyday. However, Leonard's journey lacks the innocence and spirituality of the boy's—it has been informed by books he has already read, which inspire him, but through which he attempts to view his own experience. Also, the boy's journey seems to be a journey to lose the world and find books, while Leonard's journey, at least according to the Schlegels, is to lose books and the world. However, Leonard may be seeking, in addition to escape, a perspective from which to understand his reading.

While Bast aspires to the literary, the Schlegels are tired for the moment of the literary and looking for "authenticity" in Leonard.<sup>33</sup> The narrator, sincere for the moment, notes Leonard's movement beyond his attempts at "culture": "Down toppled all that had seemed ignoble or literary in his talk, down toppled R.L.S. and the 'love of the earth' and his silk top-hat."<sup>34</sup> In the presence of these women Leonard had arrived, and he spoke with a flow, and exultation, that he had seldom known" (102). His literary references seem insincere because of the nature of books as secondhand experience, but Leonard believes that all that is profound originates in books. He feels that the power of books is so profound as to remove him from his ordinary sphere of activity and

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<sup>33</sup> For a contemporary perspective on the bored intellectual seeking authenticity in the uneducated experience of books, consider the play *Educating Rita* by William Russell.

<sup>34</sup> This "toppling" foreshadows the final collapse of Leonard's literate ideals at the moment of his death as the Schlegels' bookcases collapse on him.

inactivity: “The sound of a lady’s voice recalled him from sincerity, and he said: ‘Curious it should all come about from reading something of Richard Jefferies’” (102). Forster’s narrator laments this substitution of secondhand experience gained through books for authentic experience, or confusion of one for the other. Helen contradicts his assertion that his experience came from books:

‘Excuse me, Mr Bast, but you’re wrong there. It didn’t. It came from something far greater.’

But she could not stop him. Borrow was imminent after Jefferies-- Borrow, Thoreau and sorrow. R. L. S. brought up the rear, and the outburst ended in a swamp of books. No disrespect to these great names. (102-103)

The narrative rings false again, here, as there is surely a note of irony in the invocation of Jefferies, Borrow, and perhaps Stevenson. However, there is a movement beyond irony at the authors’ names, as the reader receives a lesson on the uses of literature:

The fault is ours, not theirs. They mean us to use them, for signposts, and are not to blame if, in our weakness, we mistake the signpost for the destination. And Leonard had reached the destination. He had visited the country of Surrey when darkness covered its amenities, and its cozy villas had re-entered ancient night. Every twelve hours this miracle happens, but he had troubled to go out and see

for himself. Within his cramped little mind dwelt something that was greater than Jefferies's books—the spirit that led Jefferies to write them. . . . (103)

Forster's contemporary D. H. Lawrence would lament the substitution of reading for experience, and made the impulse toward action a central motif in his writing; however, Forster includes a direct allusion to Emerson's "Divinity School Address" when he mentions using literary works as "signposts." As Thoreau, another transcendentalist, is one of the authors mentioned by Mr. Bast, Bast's attribution of his experience to books he has read speaks of a deeper problem with selection of texts, reading limited selections by each author, or simply a failure to understand what he reads.

It is frequently uncertain whether Forster's narrator is a separate consciousness from the characters, or whether it is adopting the consciousness of the character being discussed or described, or even another participant in the scene. Here, the narrator is critical of Leonard's utter dependence on books, and adds an ironic "sorrow," which is either a description of Leonard's state of education, or an indication of Helen's regard for Leonard's "literariness." In either case, there is a disapproval of Leonard's way of reading, his reliance on books as more than "signposts," and perhaps his choice of material. The narrative and the Schlegels condemn his choice of reading based on the scholarly reputation of certain texts, notably Ruskin. However, Jefferies and Stevenson represent books that Leonard has presumably chosen because of his special regard for them, as he has enthusiasm for them that goes beyond their status as "popular" texts. If reading according to literary reputation is condemned, and reading popular literature for

enjoyment is condemned—that is, if reading in a discriminating manner and an indiscriminate manner are equally condemned, all of Leonard’s efforts must be equally doomed, and Helen’s mention of “reading books rightly,” which seems to mean, reading with the same regard for books that they possess, is irrelevant. The narrator exercises a certain amount of authority over Leonard, presupposing his goal, or what his goal should be. The voice determines his needs, and that those needs are not met by books, and thereby deprives Leonard, as do the Schlegels, of his own choice and the dignity of his endeavor. The Schlegels’ attitude toward Leonard’s methods of self-education prompts the reader to question with what validity the intellectual elite determine who deserves to be educated or can benefit from literacy. Given a line of intellectual inquiry that asks this question, one might also wonder whether the remedy is to be sought by or within the individual who aspires to “culture,” or within the culture itself—through philanthropy, perhaps, or through a reevaluation of the place of and regard for literate knowledge within society. As it stands in the novel, Margaret and Helen admire Leonard’s experience primarily because it is different from their own, and then because it allows them an additional intellectual pursuit through their philanthropic society. Presumably, they cannot experience Leonard’s “adventure” or one similar, since Helen’s and Margaret’s situation neither permits nor requires such an adventure. His experience of walking could not be authentic for them. Instead, they seem to be using his experience as Leonard is using books—to experience vicariously something that will take them away from their own concerns, such as finding a house to rent. Helen unconsciously uses people like Leonard, or even Paul Wilcox, as objects for her intellectual interest and

to occupy her time—uses more suited to books or “causes”; using Leonard in this way, Helen fails, finally, to connect with him on a human plane (*HE* 266). Margaret and Helen later determine that what Leonard had gotten out of life was “an adventure” which, while perhaps good enough to him, was insufficient to satisfy the two of them (*HE* 288-289).

As the only one of Forster’s works in this discussion to represent a lower class reader in a realistic setting, *Howards End* provides an important caveat to his presentation of the transformative or paradigm-shifting potential of literature in “The Celestial Omnibus,” “Other Kingdom,” and *A Room with a View*. While the boy in “The Celestial Omnibus” and Miss Beaumont in “Other Kingdom” both represent lower than upper- or upper-middle class, further marginalized by their status as child and woman, respectively, only Leonard Bast, who is adult and male, is unable to employ the transformative power of literacy because of his real-world situation as a member of the working poor. Bast’s situation suggests the ways in which the literacy theories of Harvey Graff invalidate the system of cultural capital as described by Bourdieu. By questioning the system’s foundation—the authority with which the intellectual prescribes the standards of intellectualism—it may be possible to disrupt the perpetuation of culturally determined “high” literacy. However, like Graff, Forster suggests that the system is so culturally ingrained as to be virtually impermeable. The young may escape, but only if they remain isolated or perpetually innocent. Women, in Forster’s historical moment, escape by being removed from the world or by being

entirely unworldly. Men who participate in the system lose their souls, while those who aspire, but fail to achieve culture are destroyed.

Bast's end is almost humorously poetic. His attempts at literate discourse result in the exchange of ideas—and genetic material—between Leonard and Helen, a union that is productive, though not believably so, as Katherine Mansfield famously remarked.<sup>35</sup> Once again, Leonard's intellectual pursuits are interrupted by the physical, and bear fruit only physically, with Helen's pregnancy and the birth of their child. As he approaches *Howards End* to offer his apologies to Margaret for his transgression with her sister, he is accosted by Charles Wilcox, who uses the patriarchal sword of the Schlegels (another inheritance besides the books) to discipline Leonard, the shock of which causes his death from cardiac arrest. The resulting experience is narrated through Leonard's perspective: "A stick, very bright, descended. It hurt him, not where it descended, but in the heart. Books fell over him in a shower. Nothing had sense" (*HE* 277). As Leonard falls, "he [catches] hold of the bookcase, which came down over him" (*HE* 279). While not literally killed by the falling books, Leonard has been killed by the fallout from books—the ones that led him to seek connections with educated women, and the ones that inspired Helen's philosophy of impulsive action. Leonard has had emotional anguish—heartache—and a heart attack as the result of literate activity. Finally, the books bury him. However, he has failed to learn anything that will redeem his experience. At the end, "Nothing had sense" (*HE* 277). Presumably, all he had to

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<sup>35</sup> In a journal entry from May 1917, Mansfield wrote that she could "never be perfectly certain whether Helen was got with child by Leonard Bast or by his fateful forgotten umbrella. All things considered, I think it must have been the umbrella" (Mansfield 388).

gain from books was “sense,” or, perhaps, “sensibility,” but he has remained and has been rendered “senseless.” Leonard’s death is perfectly consistent with his life.

Clearly, for Forster, there may be easy allegories, but there is no easy answer to the place of literacy in the life of the individual within society, though literacy does promise personal transcendence, given the correct social circumstances. Successful models include Ford and George Emerson, the bachelor at Oxford who is able to cope with the change in his situation and his inability to secure the woman he loves, or the passionate philosopher to whom books teach reliance on impulse and trust in firsthand experience rather than literate intellectual activity. The less successful literates suggest similar lessons, but reveal that literacy does not offer solutions for all situations. Literacy can provide false hope or ambiguous solutions. The unpleasant alternative, or perhaps prophecy, is the rise of the bourgeois Philistine—to cease to consider literate activity as valuable—for the greater good of society, perhaps, but to the detriment of the soul.

In Forster’s fiction—his short stories as well as his novels—literacy registers not only thematically, it also guides the plot action to a degree, or at least forms a significant number of scenes within the work of fiction. While not all of his works are so preoccupied with literacy as to be considered examples of “literacy fiction,” the scenes of literate activity within many of his works, actual portrayals of the act and consequences of literacy, demonstrate the thematic preoccupation with literacy that permeates much of Modernist fiction. However, examining scenes of reading and writing also allows the critic to reach beyond the isolation of key themes. When such

scenes actually drive the action of the narrative, they show the centrality of literacy not only as a set of competencies held in common among educated people, a cultural norm, but also as a set of identity-forming actions that unsettles the comfortable divisions of thought and action, reflection and engagement, even mind and body. In Forster's work, as in Woolf's, literacy becomes a way of life.



## CHAPTER IV

### LITERACY AS A CRISIS OF MASCULINITY IN D. H. LAWRENCE

E. M. Forster, who was raised as part of the more privileged classes, was aware of the privilege of his situation, and acknowledged his gratitude to an aunt, whose patronage saved him from a fate that may have resembled that of Leonard Bast in terms of financial situation and restricted access to education.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, D. H. Lawrence, in both “Shades of Spring” and *Sons and Lovers*, approaches the relationship between class and literacy from the perspective of one who used his education to gain social standing. In his introduction to *Sons and Lovers*, Booth describes Lawrence as

the first great writer from the industrial working class, something made possible by the (limited) educational opportunities opened to his generation by the 1870 and 1902 Education Acts. However, his education and his pursuit of a writing career took him away from that class. By the time the final draft [of *Sons and Lovers*] was written he was living on the Continent with a German aristocratic woman. Lawrence always opposed and felt awkward about the self-consciousness of the artist, but if he sought to suggest that his own experiences

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<sup>36</sup> “Marianne Thornton left him a legacy that enabled him to attend Cambridge and travel afterward. He was always ambivalent about his Clapham Sect heritage, but in his last book—an affectionate but not uncritical biography of his great-aunt—he declared that ‘she and no one else made my career as a writer possible, and her love, in a tangible sense, followed me beyond the grave’” (Summers 2).

were ‘ordinary’ and typical of the Nottinghamshire coal field then that must be questioned. (Booth xvii)

Lawrence’s experiences of working class life are filtered through his subsequent rise as a result of his literacy. His portrayal of literate activity, while critical, differs from the exaggerated portrait of Mr. Bons in “The Celestial Omnibus,” who values his books and education for their potential to impress his social equals and inferiors, and from the harsh condemnation of the narrator Inskip’s opportunism, which is facilitated by his advanced literacy in “Other Kingdom.”

Through his portrayal of the interaction between individuals—particularly lovers and former lovers—Lawrence evokes a literacy that is both liberating and constraining. He deals explicitly with the effects of learning on masculinity in “Shades of Spring,” developing characters who are highly literate but emasculated, and unschooled though earthy. While these categories persist in *Sons and Lovers*, which is a reworked, more detailed version of the same story, the references to masculinity are less explicit. Instead, the novel focuses on the influence of literacy on class—literacy’s function in facilitating social mobility, as well as its use as a marker of class. Another idea introduced in *Sons and Lovers* is the role of literacy in an intimate relationship, alluded to in “Shades of Spring,” but developed more fully through the interaction of Paul and Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*. Lawrence’s work thus provides contrasting examples to those given by Forster of the influence of literacy on social class, or the constraints placed on literacy by one’s economic situation. Lawrence, who has experienced the

social mobility permitted by acquisition and use of advanced literacy is much less willing to dismiss advanced literacy as impossible or inadvisable for the lower classes. However, he is skeptical of literacy's uses and worth to the individual, recognizing that there is an exchange of animal power for literate refinement of which he remains dubious. In addition to dramatizing the concerns articulated by literacy theorists such as Harvey Graff about the relationship between literacy and social class, Lawrence's portrayal of literacy-based romantic and sexual relationships in "Shades of Spring," and especially in *Sons and Lovers*, has the potential to extend literacy theory by defining the influence of literacy—in this case, literacy-based pedagogy—on the intimate life of the individual in addition to his/her socio-political existence.

McLuhan cites Lawrence as trying to counter the phenomenon by which literacy fragments the "imaginative, emotional, and sense life" of the individual: "Today the mere mention of D. H. Lawrence will serve to recall the twentieth-century efforts made to by-pass literate man in order to recover human 'wholeness'" (McLuhan *UM* 88). For all of the authors in this study, literacy is a major factor in human relationships. However, only Lawrence develops the connection in detail, treating the literacy learning relationship as parallel to, almost a metaphor for, the manipulation and power play of a romantic/sexual relationship, demonstrating the similarities between the two types of relationships and the ways in which the two may be interconnected. In *Sons and Lovers* the romantic relationship between Paul and Miriam is initiated through a pedagogical relationship—a literacy relationship. The literacy relationship also prefigures the sexual relationship, including Paul's frustrations with and rebellion against Miriam's very

nature. The same personality traits that cause strife in their literate interactions also cause strife in their intimate relationship, suggesting that shared literacy—if it reaches such a level—is itself a kind of intimacy that reveals the souls of the participants.

### **Hyper-literate and Semi-literate Masculinity in “Shades of Spring”**

In “Shades of Spring,” Lawrence introduces the character of a young man, recently married, who returns to his home town after an extended absence during which he has pursued a higher level of education than is common among those who share his socio-economic background. The evidence of this divide is at first subtle, revealed in the scene of confrontation between the young man, Syson, and his interpolator, the gamekeeper and new love interest of Syson’s former lover, Hilda, primarily through the keeper’s observations of Syson’s “scholarly” manner. In this way, the reader is also alerted to the changes that occur in a man with the acquisition of higher literacy. The first observation that the gamekeeper makes, related through the voice of the narrator, is that “Syson looked too much the gentleman to be accosted” (98). Upon encountering the gamekeeper, Syson “look[s] at the fellow with an impersonal, observant gaze” (99). Syson’s “gentlemanly” appearance provides a preview of his “gentlemanly” mannerisms—or, rather, the words he uses to distinguish himself as an educated gentleman in contrast to Hilda’s family. His interaction with her family centers around the use of the term “dinner,” which, in cultured society, to which he has gained access through his education, was used to refer to a later meal, while the more colloquial usage uses “dinner” to refer to “lunch” (102). While not specifically scenes of reading, these

scenes illustrate what might be called the “fallout” of literate activity—alienation, intentional or otherwise, from one’s background and original social class.

Lawrence points to a more detrimental form of alienation from one’s self occasioned by advanced literate activity, suggesting that to become educated, to read excessively, is to invite misery, stifling the animal (hence, sexual) nature of man. For example, upon admitting to the gamekeeper that he is married, Syson is described as laughing “in his brilliant, unhappy way” (100). His physical characteristics reflect, if not the effects of his literacy, then certainly his predisposition to reject embodied masculinity and masculine activity in favor of the literate “life of the mind.” When Hilda reveals that she has found the countess’s scissors in a chair from the Abbey sale, and Syson “fit[s] his fingers into the round loops of the countess’ scissors,” Hilda remarks, “‘I knew you could use them’ . . . She meant that his fingers were fine enough for the small-looped scissors” (104). His hands are scholars’ hands, not large or rough from manual labor, but feminine and delicate like those of a countess who is accustomed to sewing and delicate work.

Syson’s scholarly effeminacy is presented in direct contrast to the keeper’s earthy, animal manliness. From their earliest encounter, Syson perceives the masculinity of Hilda’s new lover, who represents the antithesis of the scholar:

It was a young man of four or five and twenty, ruddy, and well favoured. His dark blue eyes now stared aggressively at the intruder. His black moustache, very thick, was cropped short over a small, rather soft mouth. In every other

respect the fellow was manly and good-looking. He stood just above middle height; the strong forward thrust of his chest, and perfect ease of his erect, self-sufficient body, gave one the feeling that he was taut with animal life, like the thick jet of a fountain balanced in itself. (99)

Although the keeper's mouth is "small" and "rather soft," it is framed by thick black hair of his moustache—at once a signal of manliness, as facial hair is associated with sexual maturity, and of his animal nature, as the thickness and blackness suggests bear hide, or perhaps the hides and skins that outfit his cabin: "The apartment was occupied almost entirely by a large couch of heather and bracken, on which was spread an ample rabbit-skin rug. On the floor were patchwork rugs of cat-skin, and a red calf-skin, while hanging from the wall were other furs" (107). That this animal manliness is associated with a kind of advanced and almost aggressive masculine sexuality is evident in the phrases that describe him, particularly "forward thrust," "erect" body, and his comparison to the "thick jet of a fountain." The narrative takes the reader step by step through the male sexual act, including climax, in the description of this semi-literate, yet "cunning," "inventive," and "thoughtful" (107) man ("but not beyond a certain point") who is engaged with the natural forces surrounding him. By contrast, Syson observes nature dispassionately, "appreciating" it—reading it—rather than experiencing, living and being part of it (100-101). Hilda sums up Syson's hyper-literate, scholarly distance, observing how he "'plucked a thing and looked at it till [he] had found out all. . . about it, then . . . threw it away'" (108). Like Mr. Bons in Forster's "The Celestial Omnibus,"

Syson reads not for engagement with the material—which the keeper achieves physically—but to suit his own, largely social purposes.

The scenes of literacy in “Shades of Spring” cluster around three major thematic issues: the relationships between individuals as mediated by literacy, interaction with nature as mediated by literacy, and, to a lesser degree in this work, though it figures prominently in *Sons and Lovers*, the difference between learned (literate) and unlearned culture—that is, the relationship between literacy and social standing. The question of the influence of literacy on manliness—male sexuality in particular—overshadows all of these themes, as the manliness of the literate individual is expressed through his personal and sexual relationships, relationships with nature, and social relationships.

The earliest scene of literate activity—in this case, an exchange between hyper-literate culture (represented by Syson) and semiliterate or uneducated culture—occurs at Hilda’s home, where Syson visits Hilda and encounters her family briefly. In this meeting, class difference manifests itself in the difference between rustic and learned culture, indicated by use of vocabulary. When Syson arrives at Hilda’s parents house, he is greeted by her family at a mealtime and invited to stay:

“We are just finishing dinner,” she said. [. . .] “I am sorry I come at lunch-time,” said Syson. [. . .]

“Have you had any dinner?” asked the daughter.

“No,” replied Syson, “It is too early. I shall be back at half-past one.”

“You call it lunch, don’t you?” asked the eldest son, almost ironical. (102)

Syson's emphatic use of the term "lunch"—referring to the specific meal—in response to the family's repeated use of the word "dinner"—emphasizes his own feeling of superiority or represents his assertion of his superiority from having associated with well-educated, hence, more *cultured* society (in Bourdieu's sense). The eldest son's response seems to indicate either contempt for the distinction or an acknowledgement of the insult, if not both, but his response also clearly indicates that he is familiar with the "cultured" usage, but persists in the colloquial.

The pedagogical nature of the sexual relationship between Syson and Hilda is revealed through scenes that are informed by literacy, such as the scene of their re-acquaintance in her parents' house during Syson's visit. Exploring her family home reveals evidence of the pedagogical aspect of their relationship:

Opening a high cupboard let in the thickness of the wall, he found it full of his books, his old lesson books, and volumes of verse he had sent her, English and German. The daffodils in the white window-bottoms shone across the room, he could almost feel their rays. The old glamour caught him again. His youthful water-colours on the walls no longer made him grin; he remembered how fervently he had tried to paint for her, twelve years before (103).

This brief scene depicting the rediscovery of his "old school books," and with them the memories and feelings of his courtship of Hilda, suggests a discrepancy in the levels of literacy of man and women in the romantic relationship. This discrepancy between male



and female, the former with aspirations requiring education and the latter with no expectation of attaining such aspirations, but reliant on the will of the former, will be further developed by Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers*. It appears here as a subtle suggestion of the power imparted to one member of a relationship if the relationship is formed around books that one lends to the other in an attempt to educate the other party. As in “Other Kingdom,” in which Harcourt dictates what Miss Beaumont should learn, Syson has control over Hilda’s mind—her very consciousness—through his selection of her reading materials.

The control, however, is not to be confused with sexual power or influence, or even lasting control. Hilda proves worthy of his investment in her intelligence, but more cunning than Syson, and also more of a balanced figure within the triangular relationship. Responding to his new vision of her, or to a newly revealed aspect of her person, Syson observes that “she was not what he had known her to be” (104). Rather, he detects “a surety . . . a certain hardness like arrogance hidden under her humility” (104). She has rejected his need for validation through her, nor does she succumb, like Syson, to a desire for knowledge. Rather, she uses Syson to complete her own educational experiment, perhaps using him to determine what can be gained from pursuit of advanced literacy and literate society. Ultimately, she proves beyond his ability to control, and, having gained what she would have from her role as student, Hilda rejects his path, choosing the earthy manliness and sexual fulfillment offered to her by the keeper. In a discussion of their past, realizing how Hilda has manipulated his own literate activities, Syson accuses Hilda of controlling his pursuit of higher literacy:

“You *would* have me take the Grammar-school scholarship—you would have me foster poor little Botell’s fervent attachment to me, till he couldn’t live without me—and because Botell was rich and influential. You triumphed in the wine merchant’s offer to send me to Cambridge, to befriend his only child. You wanted me to rise in the world. And all the time you were sending me away from you—every new success of mine put a separation between us, and more for you than for me. You never wanted to come with me: you wanted just to send me to see what it was like. I believe you even wanted me to marry a lady. You wanted to triumph over society in me.” (108).

Hilda has, in essence, experienced hyper-literacy vicariously, through Syson, in order to reject it and him. Syson, meanwhile, has been emasculated not only by his scholarly pursuits, but also by Hilda’s control of those pursuits.

Literacy also provides the locus of romantic conflict and jealousy between Hilda’s former lover, Syson, and her current lover. During their initial meeting, when the keeper learns of Syson’s identity, he presses Syson about the nature of his relationship with Hilda, focusing on their literate exchanges, which, as the reader discovers shortly, have been the locus of their relationship from the beginning:

“If you’re married, what do you keep writing to her for, and sending her poetry books and things?” asked the keeper. Syson stared at him, taken aback and humiliated. Then he began to smile.

“Well,” he said, “I didn’t know about you---”

Again the keeper flushed darkly:

“But if you are married--” he charged.

“I am,” answered the other cynically.

Then, looking down the blue, beautiful path, Syson felt his own humiliation.

“What right *have* I to hang on to her?” he thought, bitterly self-contemptuous.

“She knows I’m married, and all that,” he said.

“But you keep sending her books,” challenged the keeper.

Syson, silenced, looked at the other man quizzically, half-pitying. Then he turned.

“Good-day,” he said, and was gone. Now, everything irritated him: the two sallows, one all gold and perfume and murmur, one silver-green and bristly, reminded him that here he had taught her all about pollination. What a fool he was! What god-forsaken folly it all was! (101)

The keeper fears and resents Syson’s correspondence with Hilda, specifically the giving of books, because of the intimacy it implies. The keeper implies, also, that the level of intimacy in their exchange is such that it contradicts—or should contradict—Syson’s marriage to another. He implies a kind of literate- or intellectual adultery.

The intimacy here between Hilda and Syson is also the intimacy of a pedagogical intellectual relationship, in which one person—the “teacher”—seeks to educate the “student.” Even if the two are equal in terms of age and class, there is a hierarchical relationship implied by the quality of the interaction and the intent of on to train the mind of the other. One necessarily has something that the other wishes to gain, or that he wishes the other to gain. Because this is, further, a romantic relationship, the commerce in knowledge is complicated by sexual commerce, as is this passage, in which Syson remarks that “he had taught her all about pollination” (101). Though teaching her “all about pollination” carries a sexual suggestion, referring to the reproduction of the plant and suggesting obliquely human sexuality and the exchange of “seed,” the context of the preceding conversation was the exchange of books, and, by extension, of knowledge gained through books. Thus, their exchange is sterile—even impotent, even though the subject matter they discuss is fertility. Though the keeper does not understand the asexual nature of the exchange between Hilda and Syson, he is the means to Syson’s disillusionment about the nature of his former relationship with Hilda. Syson suddenly realizes that his instruction of Hilda in matters of pollination—that is, plant reproduction—was “folly.” Their bookish interaction was doomed to remain on the scholarly and non-sexual level, raising again the issue of the hyper-literate individual’s divorce from active, essential, masculine sexual energy.

The relationship between Syson and Hilda was not one in which natural fertility in the sense of procreation was ever intended. This type of fertility—or at least the sexual union that leads to such fertility—is, however, implied in the relationship

between Hilda and the keeper. It does seem that, on some level, Syson and Hilda each wish to fulfill a type of creative impulse through the other—Hilda to make Syson into the hyper-literate scholar and “conquer society through him,” living vicariously through his pursuit of literate knowledge, and Syson to make Hilda like himself, reproducing his own knowledge in her, and then forming her in an ideal image, like “some Beatrice” (110). Hilda’s efforts to create Syson in her idealized image succeed to the extent that he has taken the scholarship, used his friend’s influence to access a Cambridge education and risen in society because of her influence, presumably in order to study the effect of this path on Syson as an individual and a man, but fail because the result only distances him from her (perhaps by design). However, Syson’s efforts with Hilda fail utterly, and she instead grows in sexual knowledge and develops a “hardness”—a distance from him that he is unable to comprehend. In either case, there is a kind of sterility and impotence about their relationship and attempts at creation. Hilda’s efforts with Syson make him, seemingly, less of a man, while his efforts with her, being misdirected, fail to achieve the end he desires.

While the keeper has been Hilda’s means to learning about sexual activity in an immediate way, Syson has been Hilda’s means to learn about intellectual pursuits and advanced literacy, in an appropriately distanced way, as literate activity is inherently distanced from the immediacy of the human life-world. Love, meanwhile, is dependent on immediacy rather than intellectual distance:

Watching his face, her eyes went hard. She saw the scales were fallen from him, and at last he was going to see her as she was. It was the thing she had most dreaded in the past and most needed, for her soul's sake. Now he was going to see her as she was. He would not love her, and he would know he could never have loved her. The old illusion was gone, they were strangers, crude and entire. But he would give her her due—she would have her due from him. (104-105)

In this passage, read as coming directly from her own consciousness, Hilda seeks his judgment—the aloof judgment of a scholar who is now no longer clouded by the emotions of their past. Her thoughts emphasize both a restoration of sight and allude to a visual revelation as they echo the conversion of St. Paul in Acts 9:18: “Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight.” The image of “falling scales” further suggests animal life—though a fish—nature, perhaps suggesting that what little animal nature was left to him was cold rather than warm and mammalian. Simply, Hilda realizes that Syson could never have loved her, because love is warm and immediate and his hyper-literacy, which allows him to “read” their past relationship with cold calculation and distance, precludes immediacy. She, meanwhile, has advanced over him through knowledge of sexual intimacy, while he has attained advanced literacy. It is clear that Syson regards the intellectual exchange as more intimate than Hilda, who has rejected Syson's form of intimacy for the virility of the keeper and sexual rather than intellectual fulfillment. While Syson initially used his learning to seduce Hilda, it is this very learning—his hyper-literacy—that betrays him, and unlike the more well-adjusted

characters in Forster's fiction, he is unable to retreat and find consolation in his literate activity. Seeking comfort in literate activity would not be appropriate response to this situation, or at all appropriate in the context of these meetings and interpersonal relationships.

The idea that exchange of intellectual material is a form of intimacy—akin to, if not as potent as, the exchange of genetic material in mating—surfaces again as the keeper, Syson, and Hilda argue over whether Syson and Hilda should continue their correspondence:

“We drop our correspondence, Hilda?”

“Why need we?” she asked.

The two men stood at a loss.

“*Is there no need?*” said Syson.

Still she was silent.

“It is as you will,” she said.

They went all three together down the gloomy path.

“‘*Qu’il était bleu, le ciel, et grand l’espoir*,’” quoted Syson, not knowing what to say.

“What do you mean?” she said. (110)

Syson contemplates his new understanding of Hilda and her change of attitude toward their exchanges, realizing that “[s]he only wanted to keep up a correspondence with

him—and he, of course, wanted it kept up, so that he could write to her, like Dante to some Beatrice who had never existed save in the man's own brain" (110). Hilda's role for Syson has been symbolic—that of a Beatrice to a Dante—relying more on an ideal of "woman" than on the woman herself, an intellectual abstraction that is not only the product of literacy, but analogous to a literary (and fictitious) relationship. She is to be the abstraction behind his writing—the impetus of his literate activity. It is less clear what Hilda stands to gain other than the knowledge of her own power over both men. Meanwhile, the keeper argues for the discontinuation of the correspondence in terms that evoke jealousy and social relationships: "'But if he's married, an' quite willing to drop it off, what has 'ter against it' said the man's voice" (111). Hilda seems to want to foster—or at least prolong—his disapproval, perhaps to intensify his sexual attentions.

Apart from the relationships between individuals, which are the focus of most of Lawrence's works, literacy affects the immediacy with which individuals regard, relate to, or exist within nature. Literacy allows the individual the same kind of aesthetic and intellectual distance from nature as from his or her own natural self, or from the selves of other people, all of which are regarded as things to be read and interpreted, often with exclusive reference to the self. In contrast to Forster's models of sympathetic and engaged reading, Lawrence dramatizes a model of reading that promotes distance from the subject in order to serve the intellect, a bastardization of the vital energy of the individual.

Observing his interaction with nature, it becomes clear that Syson sees everything through the lens of poetry. Walking through nature after the encounter,



regarding the “gorse bushes,” “milkwort” and “lousewort,” “[h]e remembered [a] poem of William Morris” (110), and it is the poem rather than the experience of nature that allows him to reflect on the truth of his relationship with Hilda. Indeed, unlike the keeper—and now Hilda, who has experienced literacy and immediacy (the best of both worlds) learned from Syson and the keeper—Syson’s experience of nature is mediated by human metaphor. He has been removed from nature by virtue of his education. For example, he describes the place he loves as “hills ranging round, with bear-skin woods covering their giant shoulders. . . the small red farms like brooches clasping their garments; the blue streak of water in the valley, the bareness of the home pasture, the sound of myriad-threaded bird-singing, which went mostly unheard” (102). His vision is an anthropocentric vision, with the hills taking on the human garments, the farms, which already represent the stamp of humanity on the landscape, providing jewelry to adorn the hills, the pasture speaking to him of human habitation, and the birdsong being defined by the perception of human senses. While he is using the standard—almost puerile—poetic device of personification, this gesture—informed as it is by literacy—points to the dominant position that the human intellect assumes over nature. Literacy, as the technology behind personification and the force that drives the human intellect to rationalize its environment in terms of itself, skews the relationship between “natural” man—epitomized by the keeper—and the environment.

Syson’s process of “reading” even nature is described in a scene of reading, the purpose of which is to demonstrate the loss of immediacy from the thing itself. In classifying the elements of nature, Syson seeks control over them, as naming gives the

namer the power to signify the thing, depriving the thing itself of absolute autonomy. The relationship between Syson and Hilda at one time revolved around these names, with him controlling language—hence, nature—and controlling Hilda by teaching her the names he had for the things—names acquired from books. However, the fact that he once “mastered” nature does not give him the ability to “master” his own “nature”—or hers. As she acquires the dominant position in the relationship, she demonstrated her ability to be dominant in language and to use that language to name nature, though her affinity to nature belies the sense of dominance that overshadows Syson’s naming of nature:

She was using the language they had both of them invented. Now it was all her own. He had done with it. She did not mind his silence, but was always dominant, letting him see her wood. As they came along a marshy path where forget-me-nots were opening in a rich blue drift:

“We know all the birds, but there are many flowers we can’t find out,” she said.

It was half an appeal to him, who had known the names of things. (105)

Although she has command of the language that he taught her, which he has now relinquished to a degree, finding that it no longer fits his purposes, she is also naming things according to custom, stressing her freedom to move back and forth between colloquial language—which might be described as either “natural” language in the sense that it is spontaneous, stressing the closer connection that Hilda has with her “natural”

instincts, or class-based language, stressing the social distance that exists between them—and the educated, book-based names that she still associates primarily with Syson:

She was brilliant as he had not known her. She showed him nests: a jenny wren's in a low bush.

“See this jinty's!” she exclaimed.

He was surprised to hear her use the local name. She reached carefully through the thorns, and put her finger in the nest's round door.

“Five!” she said. “Tiny little things.” (105)

Even in Hilda's praise of Syson's poetic representation of nature, reproof is implied. If one *has* the stars (nature), it is not necessary to make poetry. By implication, it was Syson's poetry that made the stars “flash and quiver, and the forget-me-nots come up at me like phosphorescence” (107).

Throughout “Shades of Spring,” it is Syson's pursuit of higher literacy that mediates his relationships—with Hilda, with his own masculine nature, and with nature itself; the fact of his advanced or hyper-literacy inserts itself in between Syson and his unrealized goals or relationships, as the keeper physically inserts himself between Syson and his path, and then between Syson and his ex-lover, Hilda, embellishing the main conflicts of the story's plot. Although it does not provide a major conflict in this particular story, “Shades of Spring” hints at the ways in which literacy also mediates

social classes, directly through Syson's accusation that Hilda wanted to use Syson's pursuit of education to "triumph over society" vicariously, and indirectly through the strained relationship that Syson now has with Hilda's family.

Throughout this analysis, I assume that Syson is of the same social class as Hilda's family. While this is likely, and seems to be indicated by the scene of Syson's meeting with Hilda's family, in which her brother implies that, while Syson calls "dinner" "lunch" *now*—at this point in their acquaintance—it was not always the case. However, it is also possible that Syson occupied a higher social position than Hilda initially, and that his "education" of Hilda was intended to bring her closer to his social level rather than his intellectual level, as in the case of Harcourt's education of Miss Beaumont in "Other Kingdom." My assumption that Hilda and Syson occupy the same social class before his education derives in large part from the critical consensus that "Shades of Spring" is a version of the pedagogical romance between Paul and Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*, which concerns itself more directly with the interaction between literacy and social class.

### **Literacy, the Family, and Class in *Sons and Lovers***

In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence maintains the theme that there is a rift, if not necessarily a dichotomy, between learning and masculinity—especially masculine attractiveness or masculine sexuality—while stressing the relationship between literacy and class. Throughout the novel, Paul Morel, the most literate and artistic member of the Morel family, struggles to redefine masculinity and male-female relationships on his

terms, in contrast to his siblings, who seem to adapt well to the conventions of romantic relationships, and to his father, whose masculine sensuality and jovial charm initially compensated for his illiteracy and roughness of manner in his marital relationship. From the beginning, Morel's raw, earthy masculinity, which begins as jolly but descends to drunken abuse when his love of life, music, dance, and drink are constrained by his wife's religious beliefs, is associated with his illiteracy.<sup>37</sup> In his first encounter with his future wife, at age twenty-seven, Morel is described as

well set-up, erect, and very smart. He had wavy black hair that shone again, and a vigorous black beard that had never been shaved. His cheeks were ruddy, and his red, moist mouth was noticeable because he laughed so often and so heartily.

(10)

Immediately, he is identifiable as the same "type" as the keeper in "Shades of Spring," his description evoking the animal and sexual natures of man, especially his being "well set-up," and "erect," having a "vigorous black beard" and "red, moist mouth." In the same scene, Morel acknowledges his future wife's intellectual superiority with self-

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<sup>37</sup> While Lawrence's portrayal of man's animal nature differs between the sexually proficient keeper in "Shades of Spring," able to provide for his lover's needs and allow her self to flourish independently as the hyper-literate scholar is not, and the unruly, miner father in *Sons and Lovers*, driven by his wife's constraining manners and religion to drunkenness and violence, the portrayal of the manliness of the unlearned man is consistent. Lawrence also portrays earthy, unsophisticated and unlearned manliness in *Lady Chatterly's Lover* and "Odour of Chrysanthemums." Similarly, the learned man who has rejected Frances is replaced by an earthy country boy in Lawrence's "Second-Best."

effacing charm, while also addressing her with words that are charged with formality, as “[s]he had never been ‘thee’d’ and ‘thou’d’ before” (12), perhaps indicating her separation from his level of society. Like the keeper in “Shades of Spring,” sensuality comes easily to Mr. Morel, while Paul struggles with his own sexual and emotional nature, trying to inhabit a literate masculinity through his relationships with Miriam and Clara. This labored masculine sensuality is unlike Morel, but also unlike the well-educated William, who is nevertheless (unlike Paul) more social than intellectual/artistic.

In the novel, literacy and class are intimately connected, since one’s level of literacy can effectively determine one’s social position, as in the case of Morel and his wife. The wife’s refinement, which would have enabled her to marry above her class, derives chiefly from the education of her family, which is steeped also in religious belief. The social position of her family is described with explicit reference to her family’s business ventures, their religious background, and their regard for literacy: “Mrs. Morel came of a good old burgher family, famous independents who had fought with Colonel Hutchinson, and who remained stout Congregationalists” (8). Mrs. Morel’s religious background, a background that places heavy emphasis on reading religious texts without mediation, is of the “Independents,” “a seveteenth-century name for those who were opposed to the Church of England,” and the “Congregationalists,” a major nonconformist denomination dating from this time. They were anti-alcohol, evangelical and in favor of self-improvement and learning” (367, *n* 10). However, she chooses to marry a man for his charm and sensuality rather than his intellect, and so marries into a relatively lower position—a position of less refinement, perhaps—in the

working class, her own family having lost their status when her grandfather's lace manufacturing business went bankrupt (8). Morel's illiteracy, like his drunkenness, serves as a class marker in the novel—specifically, the mark of a man who will never rise above his class. By contrast, the Morel children—most notably William and Paul—use their more advanced literacy to escape their social position. Literacy simultaneously defines class boundaries and allows an escape from those constraints.

The earliest, brief scenes of literacy in the novel are shaped by the interpersonal relationships of the Morel family, while the most significant revolve around the interpersonal relationships of William and his fiancée, Paul and Miriam, and Paul and his employer. Incidental scenes of reading—scenes that compose an impression rather like the background of a painting of family life—nevertheless reveal the ways in which the husband, wife, and children regard literate activity, including their uses of literate activity and the occasions on which they read & write. In his introduction to *Sons and Lovers*, Booth describes the importance of “scenes” in Lawrence:

[Lawrence] was to claim in 1913 that he had to throw over the style of *Sons and Lovers*, which he held to have been full of ‘vivid scenes’ (*Letters II*, p. 142). But despite the disclaimer, the symbolic scene, used to show the deeper disposition of feelings beyond the surface flux of events and deployed with such force and skill in the later writing, is in fact a technique Lawrence was developing in *Sons and Lovers*. It is a way of investing ordinary people's lives and the events in them with great intensity. (Booth xviii)

The “scene” is therefore an important medium for Lawrence’s communication of thematic elements in the novel, among them, the importance of literacy in daily life and in more extraordinary circumstances. The novel has few extended scenes of reading, but does contain some scenes of literate activity that approximate “symbolic scenes” in their importance within the novel and to the conception of literacy that Lawrence builds throughout the novel as a whole. Much more common are the incidental scenes, which combine to form their own symbolic scene of literacy within family life.

The differences in education, religion, and bearing of the parents, all of which are emphasized by the difference in levels of literacy, fuel the family conflict. From the beginning, Mrs. Morel is described as an intellectual of sorts, considering the restraints placed upon her as a woman by her religious background and her class:

She had a curious, receptive mind, which found much pleasure in listening to other folk. She was clever in leading folk on to talk. She loved ideas, and was considered very intellectual. What she liked most of all was an argument on religion, philosophy, or politics with some educated man. This she did not often enjoy. So she always had people tell her about themselves, finding her pleasure so. (12)

This intellectualism makes an early and lasting mark on her children, particularly William, who judges his fiancée according to his mother’s example, and Paul. The



earliest conflict between husband and wife occurs as a result of a written record of financial deceit:

But in the seventh month, when she was brushing his Sunday coat, she felt papers in the breast-pocket, and, seized with a sudden curiosity, took them out to read. He very rarely wore the frock-coat he was married in: and it had not occurred to her before to feel curious concerning the papers. They were the bills of the household furniture, still unpaid. (12)

This piece of writing is nearly analogous to Mrs. Dalloway's note pad in its importance to the mind of Mrs. Morel, though the debt revealed is a more concrete and damaging deceit—a financial setback to the well-being of the newly established family—than an imagined snub from a well-to-do woman. However, both pieces of writing cause crises of sorts in the wives' faith in their husbands, demonstrating the power of writing to undermine interpersonal relationships by communicating information that leads to suspicion. Furthermore, the written record allows for the possibility of a private exchange being made more or less public, requiring that the record itself be protected, and leaving it subject to interpretation by a third party—in this case, the wife who is excluded from the information.

The Morel children are taught to value reading, which in turn separates them intellectually from their illiterate, drunken father. The intellectual separation between children and father adds to the emotional separation that their mother cultivates

throughout their lives, ensuring that the children are indeed “hers” and do not have loyalty to their father. The children engage in various forms of literate activity, while Morel is described reading very rarely, notably when he is apart from the family: “Then, in solitude, he ate and drank, often sitting, in cold weather, on a little stool with his back to the warm chimney-piece, his food on the fender, his cup on the hearth. And then he read the last night’s paper—what of it he could—spelling it over laboriously” (26). The phrase “spelling over it laboriously” indicates the difficulty with which Morel conducts the task of reading. He is unable to read the entire paper, and must content himself with “what of it he could” read. Reading is a solitary activity for Morel, and a difficult one, though presumably one he enjoys enough to undertake it during a peaceful breakfast. By contrast, in an act of kindness before Paul’s birth, Morel recognizes reading as one of his wife’s preferred leisure activities. In preparation for a new baby, he straightens the house, saying to his wife before leaving, “Now I’m cleaned up for thee; tha’s no ‘casions ter stir a peg all day but sit and read thy books.” His clumsy verbal appeal, with its implication that she had time to spend exclusively on reading, “made her laugh, in spite of her indignation” and she reminds him that the supper must be cooked (26). Her husband’s attempt at a kind act that will allow his wife time to read and Mrs. Morel’s rebuff, taken together, illustrate the enjoyment Mrs. Morel finds in reading and the constraints placed on her literate activity by her need to keep the house and prepare food for her family.

The children read well and often, having fewer constraints than their parents. William reads aloud to the other children, “from ‘The Child’s Own,’ Annie listening and

asking eternally, ‘Why?’” (38), though Morel’s entry interrupts the family’s shared literate activity, and “both children hushed into silence as they heard the approaching thud of their father’s stockinged feet, and shrank as he entered” (38). Literacy also becomes a kind of tool for William relatively early in his childhood, in one case for criticism of the family, foreshadowing his use of literacy to escape his social circumstances. For example, during a fight between his parents after Morel’s complaints about his wife interrupt a visit to their home by a clergyman, William uses his literacy to ironic purpose:

They were both angry, but she said nothing. The baby began to cry, and Mrs. Morel, picking up a saucepan from the hearth, accidentally knocked Annie on the head, whereupon the girl began to whine, and Morel to shout at her. In the midst of this pandemonium, William looked up at the big glazed text over the mantelpiece and read distinctly:

‘God Bless Our Home!’” (32)

William’s impertinent, if humorous, rebuke of his parents’ interactions illustrates the ability (and tendency) of the arrogant, well-educated individual to engage in irony at the expense of and directed toward the non-literate. Though the discord is between both the father and mother, the father disrupts the scene of contentment initially and causes William’s resentment. Presumably, then, the rebuke is directed towards Morel in particular.

In a rare time of reconciliation after an extended illness, Morel joins the family's activities, including the literate activity of the family:

During his recuperation, when it was really over between them, both made an effort to come back somewhat to the old relationship of their marriage. He sat at home and, when the children were in bed, and she was sewing—she did all her sewing by hand, made all shirts and children's clothing—he would read to her from the newspaper, slowly pronouncing and delivering words like a man pitching quoits. Often she hurried him on, giving him a phrase in anticipation. And then he took her words humbly. (43)

Mrs. Morel's correction of her husband's slow, labored reading is more in the spirit of annoyance than a spirit of pedagogy or assistance. The method described indicates her anticipation of words and phrases compared with his utter reliance on each printed word as separate from each other and from the meaning of the whole. The scene anticipates Paul's impatience with Miriam's attempts at algebra.

Reading is initially, for most of the family, a leisure activity that provides entertainment and enjoyment. It is arguably true even of Morel that he receives pleasure from literate activity. When the children are older and she gains more leisure time, Mrs. Morel is able to further indulge her intellectual inclinations by joining a Women's Guild, comparable to the Society of the Schelgal sisters in *Howard's End*, formed to discuss "questions" deemed to have social importance:

When the children were old enough to be left, Mrs. Morel joined the Women's Guild. It was a little club of women attached to the Co-operative Wholesale Society, which met on Monday night in the long room over the grocery shop of the Bestwood 'Co-op.' The women were supposed to discuss the benefits to be derived from co-operation, and other social questions. Sometimes Mrs. Morel read a paper. It seemed queer to the children to see their mother, who was always busy in her rapid fashion, thinking, referring to books, and writing again. They felt for her on such occasions the deepest respect. (47)

The children's admiration for their mother in her literate pursuits indicates the status of literacy in the Morel household, at least between the mother and children. It forms for them part of the familial bond.

Literacy eventually provides more than leisure activity for the older sons, William and Paul, and Mrs. Morel participates in her sons' ambitions. Indeed, As Hilda is able to "triumph over society" in Syson, Mrs. Morel finds satisfaction in seeing her sons excel and rise in society, beginning with William. First, "when the lad was thirteen, she got him a job in the 'Co-op.' office" (47). He advances quickly, and she takes pride in his accomplishments: "She was very proud of her son. He went to the night-school, and learned shorthand, so that by the time he was sixteen he was the best shorthand clerk and book-keeper on the place, except one. Then he taught in the night schools" (47). William's ambition is the most concrete and well-developed example in the novel of the

use of literacy to advance in society, as his efforts were more focus on advancement than Paul's. Still in his teens, William

began to get ambitious. He gave all of his money to his mother. When he earned fourteen shillings a week, she gave him back two for himself, and as he never drank, he felt himself rich. He went about with the bourgeois of Bestwood. The townlet contained nothing higher than the clergyman. Then came the bank manager, then the doctors, then the tradespeople, and after that the hosts of colliers. William began to consort with the sons of the chemist, the schoolmaster, and the tradesmen. (48)

Early in his advancement, he realizes that the combination of education and income allows him to associate with those above his class. He uses this knowledge first to advance in his home town, then moves on: "When he was nineteen [William] suddenly left the Co-op. office and got a situation in Nottingham. In his new place he had thirty shillings a week instead of eighteen. This was indeed a rise. His mother and his father were brimmed up with pride" (49). His mother hopes that his advancement will facilitate the rise of all of her children, who are on similar paths to improve themselves via education: "Mrs. Morel hoped with his aid, to help her younger sons. Annie was now studying to be a teacher. Paul, also very clever, was getting on well, having lessons in French and German from his godfather, the clergyman who was still a friend to Mrs. Morel. Arthur, a spoilt and very good-looking boy, was at the Board-school, but there

was talk of his trying to get a scholarship for the High School in Nottingham” (49).

William, meanwhile, continued to seek higher positions—the next in London—and work toward a legal career.

The novel chronicles William’s various successes before demonstrating how his financial success and social climbing lead to his eventual downfall, by way of his shallow fiancée. William is even offered the possibility of travel when “at the midsummer his chief offered him a trip in the Mediterranean on one of the boats, for quite a small cost,” demonstrating, although he does not go, the opportunities that his literate activity have provided (74). Due to his literacy, William is able to rise in status, and indeed, became “quite swanky”: “In London he found that he could associate with men far above his Bestwood friends in station. Some of the clerks in the office had studied for the law, and were more or less going through a kind of apprenticeship. William always made friends easily” (80). William, with his amiable personality (lacking which, Paul substitutes a frequently unpleasant intensity) and his education, which leads to his career advancement and increase in income, “was, indeed, rather surprised at the ease with which he became a gentleman” (80). In spite of the social activities in which he engages because of his rise in status, William sits up “in his cold bedroom grinding away at Latin, because he intended to get on in his office, and in the law as much as he could” (81), demonstrating his ambition and his means of achieving his goals. Meanwhile, continuing their literate familial bonding, Mrs. Morel writes to William in London, “direct, rather witty letters” (71).

William's downfall involves his fiancée, whose demands for possessions befitting a higher class lady lead to his overwork and eventual death. One of the more significant and extended scenes of literate activity in the novel involves William's contrast of his shallow, barely literate socialite fiancée to his hardworking, intellectual mother. However, even before he leaves home, his attachment to women and the importance of literacy in these relationships is demonstrated in a brief scene in which he severs his connections with his past by burning love letters. Literally, a coming of age is marked by the destruction of reading materials: "A few days before his departure—he was just twenty—he burned his love-letters. They had hung on a file at the top of the kitchen cupboard. From some of them he had read extracts to his mother. Some of them she had taken the trouble to read herself. But most were too trivial" (50). Girls are represented through their writing as superficial and vain, though William is clearly attracted to them and regards his letters sentimentally. Paul collects the decorative "tickets from the corner of the notepaper—swallows and forget-me-nots and ivy sprays" (51), as befits his future artistic pursuits.

William's fiancée, for whom he sacrifices his life before their marriage in order to secure their comfortable existence, is presented in stark contrast to the literate values of the Morel family as represented by Mrs. Morel, though the father declares, "'Er's like me. . . 'Er canna see what there is i' books, ter sit borin' yer nose in '*em* for, nor more can I'" (114). That Morel should relate her seeming inability to read to his own dislike of reading is heavily ironic considering the refinement of the impoverished young woman who puts on airs and has cultivated the taste of a high society lady. There is further



irony in the fact that William has used his advanced literacy to ascend to a higher social status relative to the one into which he was born, while the young lady has cultivated “taste” not in Bourdieu’s sense, but in clothing, social activities, and fine material goods, while also using her beauty and cultivated appearance to attract suitors who might secure a higher societal position.

In one scene of literate activity, William focuses his ambivalence toward his fiancée on her relative illiteracy, while his mother, who has cultivated her children’s literacy (particularly her sons’), defends her on principle, feeling that since he asked her to marry him (perhaps foolishly), he should not ridicule her—particularly in front of his family. The fiancée, Lily, prefers to “sit still” rather than read (114). William accuses her of never having read a book in her life, provoking an incredulous reaction from Mrs. Morel (114). William later accuses her of not having read ten lines of the book, which Mrs. Morel denies, though Lily is unable to recount what she has read, having only read to the second page (115). William’s regret in having proposed to this illiterate, and by implication, utterly superficial social butterfly is revealed in the narrator’s observation that “[h]e read a great deal, and had a quick, active intelligence” while “[s]he could understand nothing above lovemaking and chatter” (115). William’s relationship with his fiancée is compromised because he is used to Mrs. Morel’s intellectual discourse and analysis and can find no true companionship in his intended bride. In spite of her well-founded fear for William of the girl’s extravagance, Mrs. Morel does not find Lily to be a threat to her own position in her son’s life because the girl will not capture his interest

on a deeper-than-surface level. Later, the more intense relationship between Paul and Miriam, as a spiritual and intellectual relationship, causes Mrs. Morel concern.

Paul's social advance, though also facilitated by his advanced literacy, is a more labored process because he lacks his brother's overall social skills and possesses, instead, the pained sensibilities of an artist. It is perhaps his pained sensibility—manifested in his different regard for literacy—that marks Paul as a hyper-literate character. He possesses the enhanced self-awareness that marks a hyper-literate character, which may complicate the existence of such figures in society because of their withdrawal into the life of the mind. Although her literacy is not as well developed, because she is a woman in a family that has less regard for education than the Morel family, Miriam shares with Paul a hyper-literate self-awareness that provides a bond between the two as well as a locus of conflict. In the novel's introduction to Miriam's character, the indirect interior style reveals her text-based sensibilities: "The girl was romantic in her soul. Everywhere was a Walter Scott heroine being loved by men with helmets or with plumes in their caps. She herself was something of a princess turned into a swine-girl in her own imagination" (125). Miriam's romantic sensibilities put her at somewhat of a disadvantage with Paul, as the discrepancy between her own romanticized perception of her soul and her outward circumstances makes her self-conscious about his ability to "read" her true self: "She hated her position of swine-girl. She wanted to be considered. She wanted to learn, thinking that if she could read, as Paul said he could read, 'Columba,' or the 'Voyage autour de ma Chambre,' the world would have a different face for her and a deepened respect" (125). She considers her

“self” here as text-like, exposing her vulnerability because the “self” is externalized, able to be read in the manner of Ford’s notebook in Forster’s “Other Kingdom,” which externalizes his self in a literal manner. Like William, and, to a lesser degree, Paul, literacy is Miriam’s key to advancement, though the nature of her advancement is more personal and abstract. Rather than trying to advance in society to fit in with the higher classes, Miriam desires an enhanced sense of self-worth and ability, the intellectual capabilities and opportunities that, to Miriam, separate men from women (135).

Paul, meanwhile, finds similar torture in the discrepancy between his internal life and his external situation. Literacy was the key to finding job opportunities and also necessary for applying for positions, but for Paul, confronting the people in the street on his way to the Co-op and entering the Co-op reading room to look at the paper were tangible barriers to his job-seeking. “He knew they would think, ‘What does a lad of thirteen want in a reading room with a newspaper?’ and he suffered” (79). He is hyper-aware of his situation as an intellectual and artist in the midst of ignorance and resents his position, rebelling against it:

“Paul wished he were stupid. ‘I wish,’ he thought to himself, ‘I was fat like him, and like a dog in the sun. I wish I was a pig and a brewer’s waggoner.’

“Then, the room being at last empty, he would hastily copy and advertisement on a scrap of paper, then another, and slip out in immense relief” (80).

With William's help, Paul is able to overcome his social awkwardness, as William's skill for business language compensates for Paul's inexperience and insecurity:

"William had written out a letter of application, couched in admirable business language, which Paul copied, with variations. The boy's handwriting was execrable, so that William, who did all things well, got into a fever of impatience" (80). The muddle of his internal life is reflected in his messy handwriting, which becomes significant in the novel as Paul is interviewed by his prospective employer. Literacy triumphs when Paul gets an interview after writing only 4 letters (81).

When Paul is interviewed for his first job—a position with a company that produces medical support stockings and artificial limbs—a key moment involves the difference between "writing a letter" as composing the letter's words and content and "writing a letter" as inscribing the letter onto the page. In response to his prospective employer's question of whether he wrote the letter, Paul feels that he has told a lie by saying "yes" because he did not compose the content of the letter, while his mother takes the question as a commentary on the illegibility of the boy's handwriting. It is not clear from the context of Mr. Jordan's question which meaning he intends (84), though since copying orders is one of Paul's duties, it seems likely that Paul's ability to inscribe is more important to Mr. Jordan than his ability to compose. Nevertheless, perhaps to determine other tasks for which he might be suited, Paul's level of literacy is further evaluated through a test of his ability to read French. While it is clear that he can read French literally, he is handicapped because of his nervousness and his misunderstanding of the context of the letter, which involves the business of the company to which he is

applying. He therefore fails to recognize at the moment of reading the letter that the word *doigts*, which typically means *fingers*, means, in the context of medical support stockings, *toes* (85). Paul, in turn, complains of the handwriting of the French letter, an impediment to literacy and thus to his proving of his competence. Handwriting impedes literacy and impedes evaluation of literacy, stressing the cognitive differences between inscription and composition or decoding of text.

Paul's first days on the job prove difficult because his literacy is, in terms of the job for which he has been hired, non-functional. His handwriting is an impediment to literacy and he copies orders very slowly, and as a result, the girls who fill the orders have to wait for him before custom-making the stockings (92-93). In addition, though he has proven, through his knowledge of French, that he is well-educated, he seems ignorant of the conventions of business correspondence, including both "Esquire" and "Mr" in his address to a client, for example (93). This relative ignorance amid his advanced literacy reflects badly on the company for which he works, and he is made to rewrite the letter (94). Paul suffers at work because of the discrepancy between functional or occupational literacy and the education he has received, presumably a more classical education, which is not valued among the working class, even in a job that requires literacy, such as that of a clerk. A description of his work further reveals the tension between inscription and composition: "He sat on a high stool and read the letters—those whose handwriting was not too difficult. . . ." all of which dealt with orders for surgical hosiery and many of which, "some of them in French or Norwegian, were a puzzle to the boy" (91). There is a clear discrepancy between his advanced

literacy and the discourse community formed by the context in which he works, which renders the written material he is copying incomprehensible to him. Because of this discrepancy, the less well-educated, perhaps less intelligent people with whom he works are able to better comprehend these written orders. Because Paul is less well-suited and less well-adjusted to his surroundings than William (at least initially), he is handicapped in his ability to advance. However, given Paul's hyper-literate artistic sensibilities and the tension that this characteristic creates between his external and internal lives, it becomes clear that mere social advancement is not his primary goal, though he would like his abilities to help his mother, easing her burden and providing items of comfort for her in the manner of William's treatment of his fiancée.

### **Paul and Miriam: Gender, Power, Pedagogy and Literacy**

Perhaps the most significant scene of literate activity in *Sons and Lovers* is the scene that effectively initiates Paul and Miriam's pedagogical relationship, which leads to their (dysfunctional) romantic relationship. This type of scene of literate activity—a scene of pedagogy, which not only uses, but also relies on literacy—has analogues in the works of Forster and Woolf, specifically in scenes in Forster's *Howards End* and "Other Kingdom" and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Interestingly, all of the scenes of pedagogy involve class and suggest how literate activities mediate gendered and sexual power structures. In *Howards End*, Leonard Bast is an autodidact, and his scenes of literate pedagogy are solitary. Thus, his efforts are constrained not by another person, but by his social circumstances; while books and sex influence his downfall equally, his social

position creates his ultimate vulnerability to these forces, leading to his downfall and demonstrating the dangers of education for the poor. In “Other Kingdom,” Worters directly controls his fiancée Miss Beaumont’s education, but not by being the primary educator. Rather, he directs Inskip to teach the things she should learn in order to become a proper English wife. While his control involves their intended marriage and her education, he is not the teacher, and their intimacy (of which there seems to be little) is not a factor in her education. Sexual power and pedagogy are not explicitly linked in either work, though Leonard Bast’s situation might be considered an inversion of the usual relationship between the two by virtue of his class and social inferiority to the Schlegels, which renders his gender insignificant in the distorted mentorship relationship.

In Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith has been an auto-didact and a student, described as both “half-educated” and “self-educated” (84), but the pedagogical relationship is not portrayed. Rather, Woolf alludes to the nature of the relationship as unequal, with Septimus worshiping his female teacher and idealizing her as a poet would the beloved and finding her both beautiful and “impeccably wise” because she holds the key to poetry in his mind (84-85). He imagines himself going off to war in order “to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (86). The inequality between Miss Pole and Septimus seems, at first glance, to be a chivalric inequality, in which Septimus places himself below the beloved, who is elevated by social status and in the affection of the beloved. However, the social difference is not a poetic device in this case, as Miss

Pole's superior command of literacy and education demonstrates. She is, in fact, his teacher, and responds to his poems to her by "ignoring the subject" and "correct[ing them] in red ink" (85). The gender relationship is both reversed—with Miss Pole assuming the dominant role—and predictable in literary terms, with the dominant position of the female sublimated by the poetic relationship. The social relationship, which sees the higher class person in the dominant role, remains stable. Though Miss Pole (female, higher status) is the teacher and Septimus (male, lower class) is the student, the failure of the teacher to recognize the emotional appeal in the assignment that she is correcting anticipates Paul's treatment of Miriam (female, slightly lower class) in *Sons and Lovers*. Miss Pole seems unaware of her influence on Septimus, and though education is linked to romance in Septimus's mind, there is no question that the pedagogical relationship is being influenced by sex or gendered power structures, or vice versa.

The relationship between Paul and Miriam is less formal than this, and also less literary. Rather than representing a chivalric inversion of the male-dominated power structure, their pedagogical relationship mirrors the male-dominated power structure, of which Miriam is aware, and to which she submits in submitting to Paul's control and manipulation. However, though it is less significant, possibly because their families' situations are not dissimilar enough to merit extensive comparison in the context of a novel concerned with much wider discrepancies between class, Miriam does seem to be at a slight social disadvantage, suggesting that the pedagogical relationship between her and Paul indeed reproduces the class structure in a minor way. Though it is not



mentioned frequently, the Leivers family are tenant farmers, raising their crops in order to pay rent to a landowner (112), and Miriam remarks to herself that “if the land were nationalised, Edgar and Paul and I would be just the same” (138), indicating that because her parents pay rent to a landowner and Paul’s family does not, they are not quite social equals. Nevertheless, the difference in social class is not as dramatic as the difference between the Morel family and the society life to which William and his fiancée aspire, and so is barely notable in the context of the novel.

Miriam, with her slight social inferiority, inequality of education, and relative youth as compared to Paul, is characterized by her impractical, romantic artistic sensibility: “Learning was the only distinction to which she thought to aspire” (126). She enjoys an uncomfortable “angel of the house” superiority of feeling, spirituality and sacrifice, which antagonizes Paul’s male sensibilities as he attempts to create his own independent persona. However, she shares with Mrs. Morel, who nevertheless resents Miriam’s perceived attempts to possess her son’s “soul,” an awareness of the privilege of being a man, especially with respect to education. In the scene that initiates their pedagogical relationship, Miriam discusses her home life with Paul, casting it in terms of gender inequality:

‘Don’t you like being at home?’ Paul asked her, surprised.

‘Who would?’ she answered, low and intense. ‘What is it? I’m all day cleaning what the boys make just as bad in five minutes. I don’t *want* to be at home.’

‘What do you want, then?’

‘I want to do something. I want a chance like anybody else. Why should I, because I’m a girl, be kept at home and not allowed to be anything? What chance *have* I?’

‘Chance of what?’

‘Of knowing anything—of learning, of doing anything. It’s not fair, because I’m a woman.’

She seemed very bitter. Paul wondered. In his own home Annie was almost glad to be a girl. She had not so much responsibility; things were lighter for her. She never wanted to be other than a girl. But Miriam almost fiercely wished she were a man. And yet she hated men at the same time.

‘But its as well to be a woman as a man,’ he said, frowning.

‘Ha! Is it? Men have everything.’ (135)

This conversation echoes the young Gertrude Coppard (Mrs. Morel)’s protest, “But if you’re a *man*?” (9, emphasis original), in response to John Field’s admission of the constraints that force him into business instead of the ministry. Field replies that “[b]eing a man isn’t everything” and “frown[s] with puzzled helplessness” (9). Paul seems unaware either of disadvantages of being female or advantages of being male.

This scene marks the only occasion in the narrative in which Miriam expresses her desires not to be confined to her house—seemingly, to *any* house or domestic duties. She expresses a desire to “*do* something” and to “*be*” something. Since this is opposed

to staying at home and doing domestic duties, and since it involves learning, it seems that her ambitions are similar to those of Paul's brother William, who is able to advance by virtue of his education, or of Paul himself, who aspires to be an artist. Her initial response, that she lacks the chance "[o]f knowing anything," is more abstract, suggesting that her aspirations are less material than the men, focused more on knowledge for the sake of knowledge sake and self-fulfillment through intellectual activity.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, in "Shades of Spring," generally assumed to portray the same romantic relationship as *Sons and Lovers*—that of Lawrence and Jessie Chambers—Hilda "triumphs over society" by means of Syson. In *Sons and Lovers*, Mrs. Morel seeks to "triumph over society" through her sons, while the relationship between Miriam and Paul is more complex, with Miriam's intellectual goals being less tangible and more mutable, akin to Freud's descriptions of intellectual activities as a means to "sublimation of the instincts" (29), of which Lawrence certainly disapproves. As Miriam's ambitions disappear from the narrative, replaced by her relationship with Paul, one must assume that either that their pedagogical relationship or, more likely considering its dominance of the former, their romantic relationship fulfilled these desires, that her desires to accomplish or achieve something beyond domesticity were sublimated into a romantic and then sexual relationship, or that her ambitions were simply unimportant to the narrative, which increasingly centers on Paul's consciousness and his struggle against Miriam's affections and sensibilities.

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<sup>38</sup> See Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in which he identifies intellectual activities as a means of "fending off suffering" (29), also indicating that civilization allows for the development of "higher mental activities" (47).

As Paul and Miriam continue to discuss the constraints of being female, Paul offers to help her achieve at least part of her ambition: learning. Paul asks Miriam what she wants, to which she responds that she desires knowledge:

‘I want to learn. Why *should* it be that I know nothing?

‘What! Such as mathematics and French?’

‘Why *shouldn't* I know mathematics? Yes!’ she cried, her eye expanding in a kind of defiance.

‘Well, you can learn as much as I know,’ he said. ‘I’ll teach you, if you like.’”

Her eyes dilated. She mistrusted him as a teacher.

‘Would you?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she said hesitatingly. (136)

Miriam’s mistrust of Paul as a teacher, while appropriate given his treatment of her, seems timid and suspicious at this point in the narrative. One assumes that it has to do with this discourse on the genders and her treatment by her brothers, but her previous interaction with Paul also suggests that he will push her limits harshly and with ridicule rather than respecting her hesitation and allowing her to set the pace. Paul’s treatment of Miriam models his mother’s treatment of her socially and intellectually inferior husband, as when Paul’s impatience and feelings of superiority interrupt what would otherwise have seemed a moment of intimacy: “She was short-sighted, and peered over his

shoulder. It irritated him. He gave her the book quickly” (137). While, on the one hand, the closeness of sharing a book suggests physical intimacy, and the object that they share—a book—suggests intellectual intimacy, Paul is irritated by her closeness, perhaps because literacy, for him, is solitary, or because he distrusts Miriam’s emotional and spiritual investment in reading—indeed, in every aspect of her life.

Miriam’s reading, which is reading to learn a skill—here, to learn algebra, which, ironically, is a numeric rather than alphabetic subject—is invested with emotion, though not exclusively with her emotion for Paul, with which it becomes confused or confounded later in the novel. Rather, her delicate—absurdly exaggerated, at times—Romantic sensibility requires that she be emotionally invested in every action, while her timidity transforms that emotional investment into fear and anxiety. Miriam’s spiritual rather than intellectual engagement with the activity of learning—rather than the subject matter, for example—and with her own success or failure causes conflict between her and Paul, or, more accurately, causes conflict within Paul that he transfers to Miriam:

Then he glanced at Miriam. She was poring over the book, seemed absorbed in it, yet trembling lest she could not get at it. It made him cross. She was ruddy and beautiful. Yet her soul seemed to be intensely supplicating. The algebra-book she closed, shrinking, knowing he was angered; and at the same instant he grew gentle, seeing her hurt because she did not understand

But things came slowly to her. And when she held herself in a grip, seemed so utterly humble before the lesson, it made his blood rouse. He stormed

at her, got ashamed, continued the lesson, and grew furious again, abusing her. She listened in silence. Occasionally, very rarely, she defended herself. Her liquid dark eyes blazed at him.

‘You don’t give me time to learn it,’ she said.

‘All right,’ he answered, throwing the book on the table and lighting a cigarette. Then, after a while, he went back to her repentant. So the lessons went. He was always either in a rage or very gentle.

‘What do you tremble your *soul* before it for?’ he cried. ‘You don’t learn algebra with your blessed soul. Can’t you look at it with your clear simple wits?’  
(137)

Although the pedagogical relationship reveals Miriam’s supplication, spirituality, and perceived weakness, their shared literate activity fosters intimacy, through shared books, as in “Shades of Spring,” and because of time spent in proximity to one another, so that books themselves become symbols of and substitutions for their intimacy: “The pair stood, loth to part, hugging their books” (139). The books serve as a substitute for physical intimacy in the beginning of their relationship, as Paul tries to remain emotionally distant from Miriam.

Paul remains emotionally distant from Miriam, in part, by treating his role as teacher in a manner similar to Miss Pole, who may or may not have been aware of Septimus’s attempt at communicating his feelings of love through his poetry. He reads Miriam’s French compositions shallowly, focusing on grammar rather than content,

either because he means to ignore the content or because, as a teacher of grammar, he is reading in a different “mode.” *Sons and Lovers* illustrates several possible modes of reading that suggest literate competencies—reading with attention to the handwriting, or manner of inscription, which is essential for Paul’s job; reading with attention to grammar, or on the level of syntax, which is necessary for the mastery of a language; and “deeper” reading, reading for content and intellectual development, in the manner of Mrs. Morel in her youth. All of these modes of reading are quite separate from the social and individual purposes for which literacy is used. As a composer of text, Paul fails on the level of inscription and, initially, syntax. As a student, Miriam practices grammar, writing that will be read on the level of syntax, but also infuses the grammatical exercises with deeper emotional meaning, as does Septimus Smith, hoping that the writing will be read on a deeper level, befitting actual communication rather than school drills. These are distinctions that are easily recognizable in textual scholarship, particularly the scholarship that deals directly with manuscripts, especially of the Middle Ages. However, the distinction between inscription, syntax, and meaning/content is not necessarily considered in literacy studies, but is teased out in Lawrence’s novel. By focusing on handwriting, grammar, and content in distinct contexts within the novel, Lawrence draws attention to reading and writing as processes of coding and decoding language and suggests situations in which it is only necessary to evaluate (or even to examine or comprehend) written language on one or the other level. The combination of writing for emotional communication and writing as a grammar exercise leads to

miscommunication or the failure to communicate, or allows Paul to ignore Miriam's feelings.

Literate activity, then, has the potential to create intimacy, but also to postpone or to create a barrier to intimacy. In a pedagogical relationship, the teacher-student dynamic, compounded by class and gender, further complicates any intimacy that exists through, with, or because of books. Paul exploits his various positions of superiority in his relationship with Miriam: his intellectual superiority, his masculinity—the advantages of which he fails to acknowledge, and his slight social advantage, which, along with his gender, may be linked to his intellectual superiority over Miriam. He dominates her in their literate exchanges unthinkingly, causing her pain by his harshness and his disregard for his emotions. Similarly, he dominates her in their sexual relationship, rather ruthlessly exploiting her sexually while hating her sensitivity, failing to connect the two parts of her being in both cases—failing to perceive Miriam's "soul" as the factor that unifies her pursuit of advanced literacy, her emotional attachment to him, and her use of her body. In attempting, even at her request, to teach her—to train her mind, Paul creates a situation of inherent inequality. He has what she does not possess—knowledge. Because he possesses greater knowledge than he transmits to her, he, like all teachers, teaches selectively, choosing what he will impart—what part of his knowledge is of greatest value or most suited (relevant) to Miriam, his student. For example, in Forster's "Other Kingdom," Harcourt Woters feels it most relevant for his fiancée to be educated in subjects that would enhance her Englishness; selection of what materials to teach, then, is subject to manipulation according to personal convictions—



what materials or subjects are suitable for a woman, an Englishwoman, or a wife. While the pedagogical relationship between Paul and Miriam does not seem subject to selection on the basis of gender or nationalistic ideology, nevertheless Paul does select what material Miriam reads—a task he does not perform for Clara, in whom he ultimately shows greater interest.

Materially, Paul also has what Miriam does not possess—books. While it is clear that Miriam has read romances—Sir Walter Scott, for example—much of the intellectual and emotional currency between Paul and Miriam is in the form of the lending of books by Paul to Miriam. Books are important in the Morel family (because of Mrs. Morel) in a way that they are not in Miriam's family, a fact that gives the Morel children a social and intellectual "edge" over Miriam and her brothers. It is possible that this intellectual and social "edge" gained through literacy has costs—spontaneity, sensuality and spirituality, for example, the first two of which are represented by Morel while Miriam possesses a spirituality that resists domination by, and in fact infuses, her literacy. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence would expound upon the influence of literacy on the vital energy of the whole person. Miriam, like Hilda, retains this wholeness even with the influence of advanced literacy, though Hilda has superior command of her body—choosing to become sexually knowledgeable while Miriam is unwilling to submit to Paul's desires—and uses Syson as an experiment of sorts to see for herself what benefits she can reap from advanced literacy.

The benefits of advanced literacy are divided along gender lines in Lawrence's fictions, on which point Lawrence differs from Woolf almost to the point of opposition,

as women in Woolf's view do stand to gain qualitatively if not quantitatively in terms of social position or economic gain through literacy. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Miss Kilman makes her living before the war—albeit a meager living—via literacy, teaching history. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf promotes the writer's life as a path to personal independence and intellectual fulfillment for women. In “Shades of Spring” and *Sons and Lovers*, while the main female characters, Hilda and Miriam, pursue advanced literacy through pedagogical relationships with their love interests, Syson and Paul, it is uncertain what, if anything, they stand to gain from the pursuit. Hilda, who actively encourages Syson's social advancement by way of literacy, observes what literacy can do for a man and rejects it for herself and in the person of her chosen mate. Literacy is well-defined in Lawrence's and Forster's works as a means toward social advancement for men; the same authors have little to say about literacy's social benefits for women. In Forster's *Howards End*, the Schelgals are regarded as slightly odd by the practical Wilcoxes because of their intellectual pursuits; in *A Room with a View*, Lucy must take possession of her literacy, resisting the too-easy guidebook existence represented by the Baedeker as well as control by her fiancée Cecil. In “Other Kingdom,” Latin is considered superfluous by Harcourt and his mother, suited only to Ford, who will study further, but certainly not useful for Miss Beaumont, who must learn Englishness—and perhaps submission—through reading. Only in “Other Kingdom” is literacy—but not *advanced* literacy—considered to be of social value for a woman, although Miss Beaumont discovers for herself the transformative power of literacy. In Lawrence's “Shades of Spring,” Hilda rejects the ambiguous benefits of advanced literacy, which are

ill-defined for her as a woman, and have negative consequences for Syson as a man that may offset any social benefits he may achieve through his literacy. In *Sons and Lovers*, Miriam seems to desire the knowledge that can be gained through literate activity simply because it is denied, to perhaps demonstrate her own worth as compared to her brothers. Any literate ambitions she has become bound with, or transferred to her feelings for Paul, and eventually she clings to her lessons in order to maintain a closeness to Paul. While Hilda is a stronger character for her assertive rejection of literate aspirations, Miriam's persistence in her lessons is more aptly described as a failure to grow beyond books—beyond Paul—as Paul has grown beyond books and beyond Miriam in his sexual relationship with Clara.

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan declares that “[i]f Western literate man undergoes much dissociation of inner sensibility from his use of the alphabet, he also wins his personal freedom to dissociate himself from clan and family” (*UM* 88). Both “Shades of Spring” and *Sons and Lovers* treat the conflict between what is lost in personal wholeness—inseparable, in both cases, from masculinity—and gained in ability to “dissociate [one]self from clan and family” through pursuit of advanced literacy. Finally, Lawrence disagrees that the “dissociation” from “clan and family” can adequately compensate for the losses of wholeness that occur with advanced literacy. Dissociation from clan is not, first of all, a clear advantage or a clear result of literacy in Lawrence's works. In “Shades of Spring,” Syson does dissociate himself from his family and, more importantly, his social class, which in English society arguably carries as much importance as “clan” in terms of identity. The discrepancy between his origins

and what he has become is not portrayed positively, as his interaction with Hilda's family demonstrates. His insistence upon the higher class term "lunch" rather than "dinner" draws scorn from those who are his social inferiors, but in his home town, his social inferiors have the advantage because they refuse to acknowledge that Syson's cultured usage is, in fact, superior to theirs. The keeper, on his own territory, is superior to Syson and his learning—in part, as McLuhan suggests, because he has his personhood and vital energy (read "masculinity" and "sexual energy") intact. For Syson, dissociation from clan—and class—influences his identity in a way that is overwhelmingly negative.

In *Sons and Lovers*, the "dissociation" from "family and clan" is presented rather differently, with a focus on how far it is possible to separate oneself from one's family. Of the Morel children, the boys William, Paul, and Arthur strive to distance themselves from their family. William and Arthur accomplish this geographically, and Arthur is distant from the influence of the family, though his story is only briefly related and his distance is not accomplished through literacy. Arthur seems to have had more masculine energy than the other boys—more akin to his father—and joins the military rather than pursuing social advancement through literacy. William successfully distances himself from his family, though his mother (with her literacy) remains his ideal; attaching himself to another—a woman whom he woos with his social climbing—ultimately leads to his death. Though Paul finds employment because of his literacy, and this employment separates him from his family to a small degree, Paul is never separated from his family—especially his mother—until her death, and his mother's fear of losing

Paul is focused on his romantic relationships rather than on his literate aspirations. In the case of the Morel family, literacy cements their otherwise troubled family affections. While McLuhan's fear of "loss of wholeness" through literacy is indeed upheld by Lawrence's works, the "dissociation from family and clan" proves unreliable and not wholly beneficial to the life of the individual.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul struggles to redefine masculinity and male-female relationships on his terms creates a literate masculinity through Miriam and Clara where Syson fails; his "literate masculinity," however, is built on exploitation of women and a series of literate failures rather than successes. His literate successes relate mostly to his closeness to his mother, whose example of literacy differences within a romantic relationship trouble his interactions with Miriam. When he takes possession of his masculinity, Paul frequently departs from literate contexts, as his "possession of his masculinity" is primarily sexual. *Sons and Lovers* thus reinforces the notion expressed in "Shades of Spring," that literacy compromises masculine identity.

In Lawrence, then, as in Forster, literacy is both liberating and constraining, though Lawrence is less optimistic in his fiction about the purported liberating effects of literacy. Literacy can facilitate social mobility—an ambiguous gain—but is first inhibited by economics and social situation, especially for women. Paul, William, and Syson can move beyond their economic origins, but Mrs. Morel is constrained by her marriage and housework, and Miriam is crippled by her family's disregard for books, and does not stand to gain materially from her literate pursuits. Literacy does not benefit women, but it may undermine masculine identity, as in Syson's case. Only by

dissociating himself from literacy does Paul claim his masculine sexuality. However, in both romantic/sexual relationships Lawrence dramatizes in *Sons and Lovers* and “Shades of Spring,” literacy fosters or initiates intimacy between the lovers. Literacy also has the potential to strengthen family bonds, and allows the Morel family to cope with the difficulty of their situation, though it also provides a locus for conflict and power struggles—familial and romantic. Taken together, the short story and novel present different aspects of literacy—both its benefits and its dangers, and theorizes in interesting ways about literacy, power, gender and class divisions in personal relationships. Lawrence’s stories suggest, as his nonfiction would later confirm, that literacy comes at too heavy a price, that the “loss of wholeness” identified by McLuhan—and discussed with explicit reference to Lawrence in *Understanding Media*—is too great a risk. Lawrence, having raised himself from a lower social position and enjoyed the benefits of advanced literacy, finds himself at liberty to theorize this loss.

**CHAPTER V**

**BRAVE NEW LITERACY: HUXLEY'S DYSTOPIA AS LITERACY**

**DISCOURSE**

“He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties.”

-John Stuart Mill, “Of Individuality” from *On Liberty*

Aldous Huxley is seldom included in discussions of Modernism, though he is a contemporary of the High Moderns, and his parody of early twentieth-century intelligentsia in *Crome Yellow* is based in part on his association with members of the Bloomsbury group. Graham Bradshaw and others consider Huxley as “an alternative to Modernism” (183), basing this assessment on the observation that “various novelists in the 1920s as well as the 1930s were more inclined to treat the world as ‘given,’ without that intense concern with the problematics of representation which underlines the major modernist innovations” (180-183). Though this observation would separate Huxley’s writing from Modernist writing because it lacks the formal experimentation based on the Modernists’ exploration of perception and meaning, *Brave New World* does not “treat the world as ‘given’” in terms of socio-political structure.

*Brave New World* may be productively included in a discussion of the Modernist concern with literacy, as it does treat that preoccupation with literacy—with who reads or should read, what they should read, what prevents them from reading, what they achieve or hope to achieve through literate activity—found in the fiction and nonfiction of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence. *Brave New World* can, in fact, be read as a reaction to the cautionary treatment that Lawrence and other Modernists give to literacy, especially (though not exclusively) mass literacy, in their works. *Brave New World*, when examined through the lens of literacy theory, suggests that Huxley's society of the early twentieth century raise their considerations and reevaluation of literacy and its uses to the level of a moral imperative. Like Lawrence, Huxley treats the connection between human interaction/intimacy and literacy. He does so through both positive and negative examples, demonstrating the instinctive draw of women toward more literate mates (even when they have been conditioned otherwise), and illustrating the ways in which certain types of reading and certain reading material—here, Shakespeare—can negatively impact romantic relationships by providing a locus for the clash of different cultures' views on both books and sexuality. While *Brave New World* does not advocate indiscriminate or *unexamined* literacy, it seems to advise against the abandonment of literacy at any level of society by showing the logical consequences of restriction of literacy by socio-political entities, thus contributing—rather definitively—to the dialogue on literacy in which Virginia Woolf and others were engaged in the early part of the twentieth century. Though it presents no definite solutions, *Brave New World* links the interior of the mind with literacy, models several misuses or faulty perceptions



of literacy, introduces media substitutions for literacy, and finally examines the potential of literacy to provide coping mechanisms for the individual in crisis.

June Chase Hankins has noted the role of literacy in Huxley's text in an article emphasizing the need to foster critical analysis in students; she uses *Brave New World* as a metaphor for when individuals fail to analyze the media that surround them, but does not address how literacy is used by the characters in the novel, how it is critiqued by implication, or how definitions of literacy are illustrated and challenged through the text. Nevertheless, Hankins proposes "a reading of *Brave New World* that explores and tests some current theories of literacy" and poses as a point of entry into the text the question "How is enslavement in Huxley's *Brave New World* related to literacy?" (40). Because of her assumption that knowledge and analysis of electronic media is increasingly essential to good citizenship (42-43), her stated end goal is for Huxley's text to motivate students "to use literacy to look critically at electronic media" (40). However, many of her observations about *Brave New World* are relevant to this study. From the beginning, she asserts that "*Brave New World* can be read as one vision of what happens when a culture abandons the written word as its dominant medium of public discourse and adopts electronic media instead—of what happens when a culture changes, to use Ong's terminology, from literacy to secondary orality" (43), shifting the critical focus from politics and technology<sup>39</sup> to focus on the uses of literacy within

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<sup>39</sup> Because of its popularity, *Brave New World* is not the primary subject of most of the articles—scholarly and otherwise—that mention the text, but rather, the text functions as a metaphor in articles about fears of biotechnology or totalitarianism. Critical trends focus on science, technology, and biology—covering such topics as behaviorism, genetics, eugenics and reproduction—sociopolitical studies dealing with politics and

society. In speaking generally about the novel, Hankins observes that the introspection usually associated with death is also absent in this culture (44). Although this statement itself is not tied explicitly to literacy, except to illustrate an overall shallowness of experience, her discussion and use of the word “introspection” in an article about literacy in *Brave New World* is significant, as it is arguably the capacity for introspection that is gained through literacy in the novel if performed critically and analytically.

Hankins alludes to what she describes as the “trivial values” of the society in *Brave New World*, by which she seems to mean the “absence of the values that Havelock and Postman associate with literacy,” but attributes these not to the presence of electronic media, but, rather, to the features of the society as a whole (43). She cites, for example, the “elevation of stability (and therefore compliance) to the position of highest good in the society” (43). Citizens of the *Brave New World* read in a way that Hankins characterizes as “passive”: “Not illiterate but passively literate, these citizens read the same way they take in messages from television, radio, loudspeakers, tape recordings, and feelies: only to receive facts, values, and sensations from their rulers. Citizens never read, write, listen, or watch critically or analytically. They encounter books only as reference tools—repositories of facts—never for philosophical reflection” (44). She uses the citizens’ passivity to induce her students to regard the world and the messages they receive more critically.

Hankins also critiques the one example of literacy in *Brave New World*, mentioning, as this study will demonstrate, that literacy culture as represented by John

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economics, power, race, and sexuality, and “literary” readings focusing on *Brave New World* as a benchmark dystopia or as a satire, and identifying literary allusions.

Savage emerges as significantly flawed in Huxley's construct, as John's "exaggerated individualism," rigid moral code, and judgmental tendencies are separate from the dominant culture (45). That literacy as a solitary introspective act (as opposed to the more communal or interpersonal literate activities represented in the novels of Forster, for example, or Lawrence) sets one apart from others and that literacy of all types fosters individualism rather than communalism are key factors associated with literacy according to Ong and acknowledged almost universally by other literacy theorists. In the case of John Savage, this introspection prevents him from connecting with others, isolating him in his thoughts and literary experiences much as it does for the boy in Forster's "The Celestial Omnibus" or Septimus Smith in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Huxley shares with Modernist writers such as Woolf and Lawrence an interest in theorizing about literate activity, primarily through discourses on education, and, like the works I have discussed by Woolf, Forster, and Lawrence, *Brave New World* extends the discourse on literacy, dramatizing the questions of who reads or should read, what they should read, what prevents them from reading, what they achieve or hope to achieve through literate activity. Because Huxley is writing within the genre of dystopian literature, his literacy novel is more didactic overall, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that there are within the novel certain pronouncements about literacy that a reader can deduce from scenes of literacy within the text.

### **Civilization, the Individual and Faulty Literate Acts**

*Brave New World* announces literacy as a textual preoccupation in the extended scene of literate activity that opens the novel. The location of this scene, which occupies the greater part of the introductory chapters of the novel (ch. 1-3), is announced in the first paragraph:

A squat grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and in a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY. (3)

Significantly, the novel reproduces the text of the “hatchery” sign—all-caps, with enlarged initial letters suggesting a title or, in this case, a sign—rather than using the narration to inform the reader of the building’s purpose. Thus, the opening of *Brave New World* draws explicit attention to the use of text by the World State and, consequently, to the literacy of its citizens. The central term in the “shield” and the State motto is “identity,” which is fitting because each citizen is inextricably locked into a social identity—genetically engineered and conditioned into that identity for the “stability” of the “community.” This representation of the word “identity” announces a theme of the novel—the link between literacy and the formation of identity—that begins to unravel within the first chapters, both of which portray the processes of reading and composing text. That the reader’s first image is one of the written word—a mini-scene of reading that places the implied reader of the novel within the novel itself—stresses the

importance of literacy in the novel. Indeed, the first chapter is framed by meta-textual techniques at the beginning and end, as the chapter closes with a hyper-literate modernist “moment” in which the novel represents the conversations of several individuals who are spatially separated—a sort of cinematic gesture in print that calls attention to the linear nature of print and its inability to represent simultaneity.<sup>40</sup>

The first two chapters of the novel focus on the scene of note-taking by the Alpha-plus students in the “Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre”—essentially, a scene of instruction that draws attention to the literacy of the characters. Two key principles of the society emerge through the scenes: that recreational reading should be avoided for the good of the State, and that writing should be used minimally in a manner that merely records speech “straight from the horse’s mouth into the notebook” (4). The scene of note-taking presents the process as mechanical and unexamined, like the lives of the individuals in the society. In the text of the novel, italics represent the notes taken, which parrot the preceding line, a quotation spoken by the Director. There is no processing of information, and the notes are not taken down in abbreviated form or shorthand; rather, they are inscribed exactly as spoken. The “pencils [are] busy” (4, 6), but they “scurr[y] illegibly” (5), raising the question of whether the notes will be read. Since the students themselves have been engineered, their interior consciousness conditioned to minimize individuality, their note-taking is not represented in a multiplicity of voices. Although the students each possess a notebook, this “portability”

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<sup>40</sup> The “cinematic gesture,” here, creates a tension between the cinematic—essentially visible secondary orality, represented in the novel by the “feelies”—and the written text, exposing the limitations of text in a novel that otherwise seems to uphold the importance of reading—and thinking about—texts.

of written or writing material does not grant them individuality, as McLuhan suggests the portable book should do.<sup>41</sup> Rather, the words each inscribes are the same—their minds, represented by the notes they write, are as synchronized as their pencils, suggesting in the early pages of the novel the analogy between the mind and the written text.

During the tour of the facility, it becomes clear that the State engineers certain castes to perform “literate” jobs. In the initial chapters, the students themselves fall into this character, as do the Director of Hatcheries and the World Comptroller, who is later revealed to be more than functionally literate; he is deeply well-read. Another literate job mentioned in chapter two is the job of “labeller” (*sic* 10), which belongs to the main female character, Lenina. The job entails transferal of information from a test-tube to an incubation bottle. Though writing is involved, it is not necessary for the “labeller” to be fully literate, since the job involves transferal of symbols rather than even the level of mental activity required of the mechanical note-takers.

It is in chapter two, which continues the students’ tour of the facility, that Huxley portrays a violent deconditioning of babies involving books, sirens, and electric shock, and the reader learns that in the Brave New World, literacy apart from functional is counterproductive. Once again, the text identifying the location of the scene is reproduced in the novel: “INFANT NURSERIES. NEO-PAVLOVIAN CONDITIONING ROOMS, announced the notice board” (19). In the description of the sign, written text takes on the quality of oral expression as the notice board “announces” its location to the

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<sup>41</sup> See McLuhan’s *Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 206.

observer, an act that suggests the spoken word. The words have their own agency, and do not wait to be read, and it is unclear from this construction (the “announcement” from the “notice board”) whether a literate individual (other than the actual reader of the novel) is receiving the message being communicated by the sign. The sign, like the State, diminishes the role of the literate individual. Through the sign’s act of “announcing,” Huxley distinguishes between the literate activity of the actual reader of *Brave New World* and the (presumably) literate characters represented in the novel: the reader, engaged in the act of reading, has agency, and performs an active task. By contrast, the average inhabitant of the Brave New World, whether an Alpha or an Epsilon, *receives* information, delivered in this case by the text.<sup>42</sup> The exception is the World Controller, Mustapha Mond, whose discourses about reading in the early chapters of the book belie his depth of literacy, revealed at the end of the novel.<sup>43</sup>

The student note-takers are Alpha-plus, the citizens bred and conditioned to have the highest mental capacities. Lenina is a Beta, as is John Savage’s mother, Linda. Only Alphas and Betas—the two highest strata of society—are literate. Because of the castes and how literacy is distributed among the castes, the place of literacy in the society of *Brave New World* is apparent. Literacy is only for the upper castes, but even so, only its practical applications are deemed useful, and it becomes just one more role that the inhabitants are conditioned to accept—or, in the case, of reading for pleasure or more in depth or advanced uses of literacy—to reject. In the “Infant Nurseries”/“Neo-Pavlovian

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<sup>42</sup> One also wonders if the board did “announce” its message audibly, perhaps through some kind of sound recording device, for those who were not literate.

<sup>43</sup> See pages 35, 50, 51, 55.

Conditioning Rooms,” the students are given demonstrations of how children are conditioned to dislike books. Eight-month-old babies are shown “a row of nursery quartos opened invitingly each at some gaily coloured image of beast or fish or bird,” at the sight of which they

fell silent, then began to crawl towards those clusters of sleek colours, those shapes so gay and brilliant on the white pages. As they approached, the sun came out of a momentary eclipse behind a cloud. The roses flamed up as though with a sudden passion from within; a new significance seemed to suffuse the shining pages of the books. From the ranks of the crawling babies came little squeals of excitement, gurgles, and twitterings of pleasure. (20)

When the babies have all reached the books and are occupied, the nurses sound alarm bells and sirens, invoking fear in association with books (and flowers). This negative association is reinforced with “mild electric shock” (21) to produce “what the psychologists used to call an ‘instinctive’ hatred of books and flowers” (22). Though one of the students questions why the children are conditioned to hate flowers, he recognizes that “you couldn’t have lower-caste people wasting the Community’s time over books, and that there was always the risk of their reading something which might undesirably decondition one of their reflexes” (22). Literacy here is not only non-productive, it is dangerous because of its association with non-conformity and its disruptive potential, dangers of which are discussed further at the end of the novel.



Reading, which is linked with thinking, is relegated to tasks performed by old men, who no longer exist in the society: “Old men in the bad old days used to renounce, retire, take to religion, spend their time reading, thinking—*thinking!*” (55). Along with thinking, reading is contemptuously linked through parallel construction and alliteration to renunciation, retiring, and “religion,” all of which the State deems anti-social and non-productive.

In addition to the scene of conditioning involving books, and quite apart from the scenes of note-taking, which epitomize the “scene of literate activity” as examined by this study, there are scenes of non-literacy, which exist in direct conflict with or contrast to literacy. These scenes dramatize other media or substitutions—things that, in the dystopia, take the place of literacy, but which, by negative example, point us by implication to what literacy ought to be in the world outside of the novel. Some scenes also dramatize the absence of an interior self, which literate activity might help develop.

The student note-takers exhibit limited uses of their writing ability—hence, limited formation of interior selves—merely recording the words that the D. H. C. says indiscriminately, without questioning any implications beyond the purely functional. Lenina, the main female character in the novel, uses writing only to transfer information from one test tube to another, and initially seems an (almost) untroubled example of the ideal self without consciousness. She is able, for example, to sit “thinking of nothing at all, but with her large blue eyes fixed on the Warden’s face in an expression of rapt attention” (100). She provides further examples of her near-perfect conditioning in her interaction with Bernard, whose questioning and desire for privacy has a mildly

disquieting affect: “That mania, to start with, for doing things in private. Which meant, in practice, not doing anything at all. For what was there that one *could* do in private. (Apart, of course, from going to bed: but one couldn’t do that all the time.) Yes, what *was* there? Precious little” (88). Because she lacks the capacity for reflection, Lenina finds it difficult to be alone with another person, much less with herself. Such these free indirect narrative moments<sup>44</sup> within the text create the only interiority Lenina has—also, presumably, the product of conditioning. It is interesting to note that reading—virtually forbidden by the conditioning of the State—is a leisure activity that could be done in private and make being alone with oneself bearable. Lenina—largely lacking an interior mental life—engages in inscription, while the note takers merely record. They exist in contrast to Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson, who engage in the actual process of textual composition, a form of literate activity that requires a greater degree of mental activity and hence develops the mental faculties more extensively.

Citizens in *Brave New World* are conditioned to regard texts as purely utilitarian; meanwhile, by the use of hypnopædia, the individual consciousness itself becomes reduced to a utilitarian text inscribed by the State.<sup>45</sup> Much of the interaction between

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<sup>44</sup> Also known as “indirect interior monologues.”

<sup>45</sup> The recording of sound with the ability to play back that sound is essential to this process, and arguably, Huxley’s conceptualization of hypnopædia depends on the development of recording technology. Considering the ability to record and revisit media more generally, contemporary readers will think of CDRs for music or data and DVDs for images. Formerly, recording media would have included cassette tapes for audio, video tapes (VHS or Beta) for film. Considering audio further, we envision a record to be played, perhaps, on a gramophone. The earliest forms of recording, however, would have been accessed by way of literacy, either from print or written scripts. The hypnopædia is audio, implying the use of a sound-recording device. Additionally, the content of the recordings is predetermined, suggesting that this is an

individuals consists of stock phrases and sentences, “recorded” or inscribed on the mind of the individual through hypnopædia, called forth at the appropriate moment. Several of these automatic responses focus on the mandated use of the drug *soma* to control any unruly emotions or impulses. Among these “bright treasures of sleep-taught wisdom” (89) are “One cubic centimeter cures ten gloomy sentiments,” “A gramme in time saves nine,” “A gramme is always better than a damn,” phrases which have been indelibly etched on the consciousness of each citizen while they sleep. The mind is literally treated like a text during the conditioning of each citizen: the repetition of platitudes directing social behavior “writes” material into the consciousness of the individual, which exists as a void except for the State’s messages. The citizen’s consciousness is as much a product of social engineering as his or her physical existence. Books, as it was noted earlier, present a potential threat to the mental emptiness, and might interfere with the programming of the person. By implication, then, literate activity, in this case reading, fills the consciousness in a way that is qualitatively different from the hypnopædia and introduces ideas that may conflict with the conditioned responses. As the conditioned responses are not the subject of logical consideration by the person, the act of reading must, by implication, make the subconsciously learned and repeated phrases the subject of examination. In chapter two of *Brave New World*, the students hear a more elaborate account of the difference between learning by hypnopædic suggestion and learning from reading, processes of the sub- or unconscious vs. conscious mind, respectively.

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example of what Ong called “secondary orality,” that is, oral expression that is text-based, or scripted (Ong 136).

In chapter two, the students at the hatchery learn that hypnopædia was not used immediately because it was not at first known how to make use of the discovery. Although the sleep-taught person was able to repeat the words heard during sleep, she or he remained incapable of understanding the information. Early experimenters in the society, believing that hypnopædia could be “made an instrument of intellectual education” (Huxley 25), repeated direct statements of fact while a child was sleeping; the scientists found though the child could recall the sentence when prompted, he had no knowledge of the information contained within the sentence. The difference between conscious literate activity and sub-conscious sleep teaching demonstrates that the mind that reads information does—or perhaps *should*—analyze and process that information. Sleep taught “wisdom” is not subject to analysis. Rather, the enlightened, scientific State, recognizing the futility of trying to impart knowledge through hypnopædia, instead writes texts onto the mind that will insure conformity to the ideals of the State: “Everybody is happy now,” a defense against questioning of the state; “The more stitches the less riches,” intended to increase consumption; or “Never put off till tomorrow the fun you can have today,” which prevents the explosive bottling of desires and emotions. Hypnopædic conditioning fills space like writing on a page; as texts cannot, in a literal sense, reflect critically upon their own contents, these conditioned individuals are unable to question the platitudes. Writing is believed to free mental space otherwise taken up by memorization, allowing a greater capacity for analytic reason and abstract thought. Instead, hypnopædia functions as writing on the subconscious mind, a new memorization that more efficiently fills the space and arrests

the analytic function of human consciousness. The self becomes a speaking text—an unexamined text—announcing its writing in the manner of the sign for the “Infant nursery” and “Neo-Pavlovian Conditioning Center.” However, the mind is unlike a text because, while it does possess a kind of fixity, the hypnopædic suggestions are not external to the self, and so the messages received are not subject to—nor do they help develop—the critical ability of the human mind.

Hypnopædia is an example of a literacy substitute in addition to functioning in the context of the novel as a literacy-driven metaphor for the mind. It is an example of what Ong terms “secondary orality,” or oral expression that is print-based or subject, like print, to “backward scanning.” “Hypnopædic slogans” are played repeatedly, presumably rewound to be played again. Authors such as Helmholtz Watson, one of the rare literate figures who composes as well as reading texts, writes the slogans (Huxley 67). Helmholtz also possesses the rare ability to question his society, a trait undoubtedly connected to his literacy. Watson is also involved in the production of “feelies,” an example of secondary orality that resembles film and another type of literacy substitute. Hankins notes that “‘feelies,’ a substitute for theatre, electronically stimulate the senses rather than the mind and the moral sense—and we are reminded of Havelock’s association of the development of ethics with the rise of literacy” (Hankins 43). This reading substitute provides entertainment to occupy time and keep the mind engaged in a sense, but as Hankins indicates, the “feelies” are qualitatively different because they do not engage the intellect.

In a “scene of literate discourse” in the final chapters of the novel, John Savage engages Mustapha Mond in a discussion of the relative merits of drama as compared to feelies. Learning that Mustapha Mond has read Shakespeare, although it is prohibited, John asks why it is prohibited. The Controller’s first response has to do with making people prefer new things to the old, especially when the old things are beautiful (219), giving an economic answer of sorts as promoting new things ensures consumption. When Helmholtz suggests that he and the other “Emotional Engineers” (the composers of the feelies, among other things) have all been wanting to write something like *Othello*, Mustapha gives a more detailed answer, outlining the reasons for the State’s views of literature and the reason that the feelies are preferable, which mainly has to do with the nature of the subject matter of tragedy: “our world is not the same as Othello’s world. You can’t make flivvers without steel—and you can’t make tragedies without social instability” (220). By contrast to the society portrayed in the works of Shakespeare, “People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get. They’re well-off; they’re safe; they’re never ill; they’re not afraid of death; they’re blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they’re plagued with no mothers or fathers; they’ve got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they’re so conditioned that they practically can’t help behaving as they ought to behave” (220). The stability of the society does not allow a need for literature like Shakespeare’s tragedies, and indeed, does not allow its citizens to understand the subject matter of Shakespeare’s works, which operate as a metaphor for all of what was considered “Great Literature” when Huxley was writing. But is this primarily because of the subject matter of such

literature—that it deals with the subject of human suffering? Or does the novel imply a qualitative difference in the experience of reading such literature as compared to *The Chemical and Bacteriological Conditioning of the Embryo: Practical Instructions for Beta Embryo-Store Workers* (128)? The ambiguous mouthpiece for the defense of literature, John Savage, insists that the “feelies” are inferior because “they don’t mean anything,” to which Mustapha Mond replies, “They mean themselves; they mean a lot of agreeable sensations to the audience” (221). By implication, then, the type of literature favored by John Savage has deeper meaning than merely to stimulate pleasurable sensations, though arguably John finds pleasure—perhaps partially sadistic or masochistic—in the tragedies of Shakespeare. He invokes Macbeth’s famous soliloquy as he tells Mustapha Mond that the feelies are “told by an idiot,” and though he does not complete the quotation, he has already indicated that they “signify nothing.” Ironically, here, though not out of character for him, John puts a seemingly appropriate quotation in an incongruent context. In the play *Macbeth*, the tale that is “told by an idiot” is life; John Savage uses the quotation to refer to an actual author rather than making the persona of the author represent the author of life, presumably God. In his own half-formed literacy, John literalizes the metaphorical, applying it directly to life rather than acknowledging the art of the fiction and critically considering the degree to which it is applicable to a situation.

John’s arguments in favor of literature relate to the function of literate activity as a solitary activity, and literate activity as a means to cope with the unpleasantness of life

that has been effectively removed from the Brave New World. His own experience of learning to read was amid the trauma of his youth—of being rejected from tribal society:

Linda taught him to read. With a piece of charcoal she drew pictures on the wall—an animal sitting down, a baby inside a bottle; then she wrote the letters. THE CAT IS ON THE MAT. THE TOT IS IN THE POT. He learned quickly and easily. When he knew how to read all the words she wrote on the wall, Linda opened her big wooden box and pulled from under those funny little red trousers she never wore a thin little book. He had often seen it before. “When you’re bigger,” she had said, “you can read it.” Well, now he was big enough. He was proud. “I’m afraid you won’t find it very exciting,” she said. “But it’s the only thing I have.” She sighed. “If only you could see the lovely reading machines we used to have in London!” He began reading. *The Chemical and Bacteriological Conditioning of the Embryo. Practical Instructions for Beta Embryo-Store Workers.* It took him a quarter of an hour to read the title alone. He threw the book on the floor. “Beastly, beastly book!” he said, and began to cry. (129)

It is possible to make a few observations about the regard for books in the society of the Brave New World by analyzing this remembered scene of literate instruction. First, it is interesting to note that although reading is actively discouraged in the Other Place, as John calls the “civilized” society, Linda sees fit to teach her son to read. This impulse is surprising because of the scene in which babies are conditioned to associate reading with



pain and fear. The citizens of the Other Place do not regard books as pleasurable because reading decreases consumption and might lead to deconditioning—a point emphasized by the lack of reading material among Linda’s possessions, and by her mention of “reading machines.” That Linda acknowledges the existence of “exciting” reading material, rather than the mere functional, is also surprising unless one imagines that the “machines” might save the citizen the trouble of actual reading, converting the printed word into sound or pictures, giving back an “ear” and an “eye” for visual images rather than an eye for print, as McLuhan suggests in *Understanding Media*.

McLuhan discusses at length the implicit link between alphabetic literacy and separation from the tribal existence, with its emphasis on community, to what he describes as “civilized” society, with its emphasis on the individual. For McLuhan, literacy is tied to civilization on the one hand, and the birth of the individual on the other. McLuhan ascribes the division between the individual and the tribal society that occurs within “a single generation of alphabetic literacy” to the “sudden breach between the auditory and visual experience of man” rather than to “the content of the alphabetized words”: “Only the phonetic alphabet makes such a sharp division in experience, giving to its user an eye for an ear, and freeing him from the tribal trance of resonating word magic and the web of kinship” (McLuhan *UM* 84). He champions the various media that threaten to displace alphabetic literacy. In *Brave New World*, the product of a different historical moment, media such as the feelies are the tools of a State that minimizes individuality for the good of the collective. Huxley’s novel, then,

demonstrates the resistance to newer media that McLuhan mentions and seeks to combat in many of his works.

Literacy in the novel, like John Savage himself, is caught between tribal and what passes for “civilized” society in the novel, and does not have a home in either type of society. John learns to read—a “civilized” skill in the novel as in much literacy theory<sup>46</sup>—on the reservation in New Mexico, in a non-literate, oral culture. He is already separated from tribal society by virtue of being an outsider, born of a woman from civilization who does not adhere to the tribe’s notions of sexual morality, and who is unable to function as the culture demands. Though he still longs for inclusion in the tribal society, John’s reading, which becomes a source of pride, separates him further and consoles him for being separate.

Perhaps unlike a parent in a society that has fully internalized literacy, Linda would not have felt that it was necessarily “natural” for John to learn to read, as not all of the members of the society from which she came were literate—lower castes in particular. However, Linda would likely have considered her son as an Alpha or Beta, who were universally literate. Her acknowledgement that reading material could be “exciting” for John also suggests that she considered John in need of recreation if nothing else, something of value that literacy could provide. However, the book that Linda gives to John does not provide this “something of value,” though it is important,

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<sup>46</sup> Literacy theorists have often criticized one another for designating literate cultures as “civilized” while assuming that non-literate cultures are uncivilized or less civilized than those possessing literacy. Huxley resists this easy dichotomy, as both the Brave New World and the tribal society of New Mexico possess elements of what we might consider “civilization” and “savagery.”

even initially, for the formation of his identity in opposition to the members of the tribe, who mock him:

“Rags, rags!” the boys used to shout at him. “But I can read,” he said to himself, “and they can’t. They don’t even know what reading is.” It was fairly easy, if he thought hard enough about the reading, to pretend that he didn’t mind when they made fun of him. He asked Linda to give him the book again.

The more the boys pointed and sang, the harder he read. Soon he could read all the words quite well. Even the longest. But what did they mean? He asked Linda; but even when she could answer, it didn’t seem to make it very clear. And generally she couldn’t answer at all. (130)

Literacy helps John to cope with his situation, first of all, by being a marker by which he can form his identity separate from and in opposition to the boys of the tribe, who are not literate. His literacy allows him to take comfort in his feeling of superiority to the other boys—much in the manner of a Mr. Bons—based on this one skill which the others do not possess, but which does not have meaning for them in the context of the tribal society. Whereas Leonard Bast could have derived some currency from knowing Shakespeare, the knowledge is irrelevant for John Savage.

The remembered scene of literate instruction provides further insight into the incompleteness of the literate ability of Linda and the inhabitants of civilization more generally, and to John’s understanding of and ability to critically analyze written

language. Linda's inability to explain the meaning of the book she has given to John stems from the restriction of her own knowledge by the State:

“What are chemicals?” he would ask.

“Oh, stuff like magnesium salts, and alcohol for keeping the Deltas and Epsilons small and backward, and calcium carbonate for bones, and all that sort of thing.”

“But how do you make chemicals, Linda? Where do they come from?”

“Well, I don't know. You get them out of bottles. And when the bottles are empty, you send up to the Chemical Store for more. It's the Chemical Store people who make them, I suppose. Or else they send to the factory for them. I don't know. I never did any chemistry. My job was always with the embryos.”

It was the same with everything else he asked about. Linda never seemed to know. (130)

Linda is unable to answer the question, “What *are* chemicals?” in spite of the fact that she used to work with chemicals daily and in spite of the fact that she considered herself able—and was able, on a level—to read the manual. Instead, she answers, “What do chemicals *do*?” or even “How are chemicals *used*?” She has been given only the information she needs to do her job; she has been conditioned not to ask further questions. Her experience of literacy, then, is that the words direct her within a specific context, and do not induce her to think further than that context—in this case, her job.

The manual does not even require “understanding” as the reader of *Brave New World*—or as John himself—would comprehend that term. The individual words are not significant independent of the tasks to which they belong or the context for which they were written. Rhetorically, there is no exigence behind to the discourse of the text other than the completion of a task within the specific context. The restriction of one’s reading ability or habits to tasks that enable one’s daily existence is one possible understanding of the concept of “functional literacy.”<sup>47</sup> John Savage clearly wishes to reach beyond what might be termed “functional literacy”; meanwhile his experience of literacy is purely non-functional, as there is nothing in his day-to-day life within a non-literate tribal existence that requires reading. However, his means to achieve a deeper reading ability are limited. Like Leonard Bast and Septimus Smith, he is self-taught, but unlike these characters, he is self-taught in a culture that does not provide the context he needs for developing his literacy. *Brave New World* illustrates the idea that the ability to read beyond the surface meaning of the text depends greatly on one’s existence within a

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<sup>47</sup> Toward a definition of “functional literacy,” it is interesting to note how Anchyses Lopes (2001), in supporting the idea that consciousness and language are linked, claims that “reading and writing literacy is essential to human development and its teaching should not be construed as an act of socialization, acculturation, or training for the job market, but rather a fundamental action in humanity along its biological and intellectual axes.” Speaking of contemporary concepts of literacy, Olson discusses the “functionality of literacy” which, as he says, “it is easy to overstate or misstate. Literacy is functional, indeed advantageous, in certain managerial, administrative and an increasing number of social roles. But the number of positions which call for that level or kind of literacy is limited. Literacy is functional if one is fortunate enough to obtain such a position and not if not. Other, more general functions served by literacy depend on the interests and goals of the individuals involved. The notion of ‘functional’ literacy, unless one addresses the question ‘functional for what’ or ‘functional for whom’ is meaningless” (Olson 1994, 11). Thus Olson condemns unexamined literacy, however “functional,” and dismisses “functionality” as an inaccurate measure of the importance of literacy.

literate society. A literate context allows the literate individual to decipher the meanings of words and phrases semiotically.<sup>48</sup> The alternative is to read everything within one's own personal context; Olson explains that "readers frequently fail to consider how texts may be understood or misunderstood by readers other than themselves. Critical readers attend not simply to what a text says or means but in addition attend to the authorial intention and rhetorical form distinguishing what the author was attempting to get some reader to believe from what they themselves were, in fact, willing to believe" (Olson 157). Critical readers have internalized literacy more fully and so have a fuller understanding of the separation between their own experience and the content of a text. In oral cultures, words would, in theory, be interpreted according to the experience of the auditor, as oral cultures "tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld" (Ong 49). Even when John is given reading material more suited to his needs, his understanding is largely limited by his circumstances, and his only context for understanding what he reads comes from his experiences—his own feelings and the culture in which he lives; for example,

One day (John calculated later that it must have been soon after his twelfth birthday) he came home and found a book that he had never seen before lying on the floor in the bedroom. It was a thick book and looked very old. The binding had been eaten by mice; some of its pages were loose and crumpled. He picked

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<sup>48</sup> Contrast Ong's assertion that, the "oral word" differs from the written word because it "never exists in a simply verbal context, as a written word does" (Ong 67).

it up, looked at the title-page: the book was called *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.

Linda was lying on the bed, sipping that horrible stinking *mescal* out of a cup. “Popé bought it,” she said. Her voice was thick and hoarse like somebody else’s voice. “It was lying in one of the chests of the Antelope Kiva. It’s supposed to have been there for hundreds of years. I expect it’s true, because I looked at it, and it seemed to be full of nonsense. Uncivilized. Still, it’ll be good enough for you to practice your reading on.” (131)

It is perhaps significant that John received the works of Shakespeare when he was twelve—an age at which we do not expect children to comprehend Shakespeare. Combined with his lack of a literate context to give meaning to the words, phrases, and situations portrayed in the text, John’s youth helps to explain a certain immaturity that clings to his literacy. Nevertheless, Shakespeare has a profound effect on John, helping him to be able to better understand and articulate his feelings by giving him a frame of reference to understand them. The text describes indirectly John’s first experience of reading Shakespeare:

He opened the book at random.

*Nay, but to live*

*In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,*

*Stew’d in corruption, honeying and making love*

*Over the nasty sty . . .*

The strange words rolled through his mind; rumbled, like the drums at the summer dances, if the drums could have spoken; like the men singing the Corn Song, beautiful, beautiful, so that you cried; like old Mitsima saying magic over his feathers and his bits of bone and stone—*kiathla tsilu silokwe silokwe. Kiai silu silu, tsithl*—but better than Mitsima’s magic, because it meant more, because it talked to *him*; talked wonderfully and only half-understandably, a terrible beautiful magic, about Linda; about Linda lying there snoring, with the empty cup on the floor beside the bed; about Linda and Popé, Linda and Popé. (131-132)

John seems to tap into a residual orality present in Shakespeare’s works both by virtue of their genre, which relies on the visual and aural elements of performance, and the historical moment of their composition, when literacy was present, and gaining importance, but not internalized on a cultural or societal level. Because of the oral roots of poetic rhythm, John is also captivated by the rhythm of the Shakespearean language. In his cultural context, the rhythm of the text invokes the magic of the medicine-man figure. As such, the text with its oral properties, holds for John the significance of the tribal religion, but exists in text form. For John, Shakespeare’s works are a mystical text, perhaps more so because they are “only half-understood.”



Huxley dramatizes the way in which John's literacy develops his sense of self, helping him to fully realize his feeling by contextualizing them and providing words for him to express them, particularly his hatred of his mother Linda's lover Popé:

He hated Popé more and more. A man can smile and smile and be a villain. Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain. What did the words exactly mean? He only half knew. But their magic was strong and went on rumbling in his head, and somehow it was as though he had never really hated Popé before; never really hated him because he had never been able to say how much he hated him. But now he had these words like drums and singing and magic. These words and the strange, strange story out of which they were taken (he couldn't make head or tail of it, but it was wonderful, wonderful all the same)—they gave him a reason for hating Popé; and they made his hatred more real; they even made Popé himself more real. (132)

John's understanding of his own hatred leads him to mimic the actions associated with feelings of hatred (he supposes) in *Hamlet*:

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous. . . Like drums, like the men singing for the corn, like magic, the words repeated and repeated themselves in his head. From being cold he was suddenly hot. His cheeks burnt with the rush of blood, the

room swam and darkened before his eyes. He ground his teeth. "I'll kill him, I'll kill him, I'll kill him," he kept saying. And suddenly there were more words.

*When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage*

*Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed. . .*

The magic was on his side, the magic explained and gave orders. (133)

The process of reading does, for John, develop his mind, but rather than allowing him to objectify his experience, he uses Shakespeare as an extension of his experience.

John's mystical regard for a text can be traced to the oral resonances that remind him of the medicine man's magic, but in his language, English. His mystical regard for the words in the book might also relate to dynamics of literacy. Ong discusses the ways in which a book might be seen as resembling a prophecy of oral cultures because of the quality of "autonomous discourse," "discourse that cannot be directly questioned" (Ong 78), possessed by both books and oracles. While "autonomous discourse" is primarily a feature of literacy, "oral cultures know a kind of autonomous discourse in fixed ritual formulas (Olson 1980a, pp. 187-94; Chafe 1982), as well as in vatic sayings or prophecies" (Ong 78). John's use of the text and comparison of the text to the "magic" of tribal religion thus fits Ong's theories. The novel further elaborates the mystical qualities of the text as with Shakespeare, John creates a personal, unique, text-based religion. As Ong notes,

Writing makes possible the great introspective religious traditions such as Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All these have sacred texts. The ancient Greeks and Romans knew writing and used it, particularly the Greeks, to elaborate scientific and scientific knowledge. But they developed no sacred texts comparable to the Vedas or the Bible or the Koran, and their religion failed to establish itself in the recesses of the psyche which writing had opened for them. It became only a genteel, archaic literary resource for writers such as Ovid and a framework of external observances, lacking urgent personal meaning. (Ong 105)

While Huxley portrays the tribal religion as taking root in John's psyche, at least to a degree, he is prevented from fully internalizing it, more because of his exclusion as an outsider than because it has no sacred text. The contrast that Ong notes, then, is not best represented by John's religion of Shakespeare, with its text and its similarity for John to the tribe's moral dictates. Rather, the text-based versus non-text-based religious dichotomy is represented by John's religion of Shakespeare, on the one hand, and the religion of the "Solidarity Service," another literacy substitute, on the other hand. The "Solidarity Service" has many of the features of orality, such as its outward, communal functionality. It also promotes communal interaction rather than solitary study.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Primary orality fosters personality structures that in certain ways are more communal and externalized, and less introspective than those common among literates. Oral communication unites people in groups. Writing and reading are solitary activities that throw the psyche back on itself" (69). The communal nature of orality and solitary nature of literacy are the reasons that the State discourages literacy and organizes, instead, secondarily oral activities, which I designate as "secondarily oral" because they have been invented, recorded, and implemented by literate minds.

John's limited understanding of the text, lack of a context for learning the meanings of words, phrases, and situations in Shakespeare, failure to differentiate between Shakespeare's works and his own experience, and elevation of Shakespeare to the status of a religious text are features of his reading that prevent John from truly internalizing literacy. The nature of his literacy and reading material and his use of that reading material separate John Savage from "civilized" society as much as they separated him from the tribal society. Nevertheless, John is one of the more literate characters in the novel, and he is able to use his literacy to cope with his situation in the pueblo as an outcast from the tribe, and then, in civilization, to understand and to cope, albeit less successfully, with the various new experiences and ideas he encounters. He uses literacy, first of all, to separate himself from those who reject him, claiming an identity that is separate from theirs by virtue of his new ability. Reading ability gives him superiority. The use of literacy to separate oneself from one's peer group or family—from whom one may feel estranged or rejected—is a motif that is repeated in all of the works in this study: in "Celestial Omnibus," Mr. Bons's reading allows him to separate himself from the other bourgeoisie and aspire to an intellectual elitism via cultural capital that places him closer to the nobility. The boy is inadvertently separated from his parents by virtue of his reading experiences. In "Other Kingdom," Worters wishes to separate Miss Beaumont from her primitive Irishness and align her with Imperial British ideals through her literary education. In *A Room with a View*, Cecil would have Lucy Honeychurch separate herself from her family, whom he considers base, through reading and the arts, and in Forster's *Howard's End*, as with Paul in

Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, Leonard Bast strives to achieve a level of literacy that will allow him to rise above his class. Although his literacy is not internalized fully, literate activity also offers to John a kind of solace: the more they mocked him, the harder he read. John, who is unable, unlike his mother, to retreat into physical pleasure to escape his mental anguish because of his marginalized status and the tribal mores he has internalized resorts to reading to cure—or at least to give name to—his pain and loneliness. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud theorizes the ways in which individuals fend off the “many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks” (23) that make life too difficult for them to bear:

Another technique for fending off suffering is the employment of the displacements of libido which our mental apparatus permits of and through which its function gains so much in flexibility. The task here is that of shifting the instinctual aims in such a way that they cannot come up against frustration from the external world. In this, sublimation of the instincts lends its assistance. One gains the most if one can sufficiently heighten the yield of pleasure from the sources of psychical and intellectual work. When that is so, fate can do little against one. (29)

One technique that Freud identifies to fend off suffering is to displace the libido through sublimation of the instinct through psychical and intellectual—read *literate*—work. Intellectual activity—here, literate activity—can provide a defense against suffering of

the body, or of the torment of strong feelings like the desire that John feels for a girl in the village and then Lenina. It can also compensate John for the loneliness and shame of living as an outcast.

John's literacy does give him a frame of reference for understanding and labeling his own experience—he gains labels for the shameful actions of his mother, the nature of which he did not previously understand, though he knew that the tribe's code of conduct condemned her. He is able to articulate his hatred for Popé, and so feel it more acutely, when he reads the words that Shakespeare uses to describe adultery and strong emotion. The power of naming is a quality of oral culture that John nevertheless gains from literacy because the book gives him new names—his names—for emotions and concepts that he previously could not name because his language (i.e. Linda's language) did not supply the names he needed. Ong explains:

Oral people commonly think of names (one kind of words) as conveying power over things. Explanations of Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis 2:20 usually call condescending attention to this presumably quaint archaic belief. Such a belief is in fact far less quaint than it seems to unreflective chirographic and typographic folk. First of all, names do give human beings power over what they name: without learning a vast store of names, one is simply powerless to understand, for example, chemistry and to practice chemical engineering. And so with all other intellectual knowledge. Secondly, chirographic and typographic folk tend to think of names as labels, written or printed tags imaginatively affixed

to an object named. Oral folk have no sense of a name as a tag, for they have no idea of a name as something that can be seen. Written or printed representations of words can be labels; real, spoken words cannot be. (33)

John's need to name his emotions, to be able to understand and to own them more fully, is a combination of oral and literate impulses. On the one hand, the impulse derives from the power to name—by naming, he is exercising control over the emotions and concepts. At the same time, however, naming gives the emotions an external reality—apart from John's interior self—that can only be achieved through literacy—seeing the words in print and reading about the concepts.

When he reaches “civilized” London, he relies on stock phrases from Shakespeare to describe his experience, though the words, taken out of context, neither remain true to their original meanings nor do they apply to the new situations in which they are used. Rather, they function as an extension of John's psyche—a prosthesis, as Freud would have it (*CD* 44), or McLuhan's “extension of man” as *Understanding Media* designates—and a fixed repository for his beliefs, his code of morality and his prejudices, none of which are firmly based in an objective reading of Shakespeare or a critical understanding of the texts. Literacy, in part, has allowed John to cope by externalizing his interior self rather than helping to develop it or to analyze it objectively, or by giving him a frame of reference for understanding situations and experiences alien to his own. The dangerous combination of partial literacy and partial (primary) orality leads to John's indwelling (different from introspection because

“indwelling” does not imply analysis) and obsession on his plight, as the texts have an authority that is attractive, words that are new, but they resonate in his head like the orality of the tribal religious “magic.” John emerges able to categorize actions, but not to analyze experience, and so fails as a hero, demonstrating a particular failure of literacy.

Literacy does lend to select characters in the novel an interior mental life that stands in stark contrast to the emptiness of the conditioned citizen—an interior life that is characterized in part by the ability to question, though John always possessed that ability because of half-knowledge and lack of conditioning rather than because of literacy. The importance placed on a mental life in *Brave New World* stands in opposition to some of Lawrence’s theories about education and, by implication, about literacy, though Lawrence also links self-consciousness to literacy. Lawrence would have individuals avoid self-consciousness in favor of dynamic action, and in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, advocates that schools be closed and “no child learn to read, unless it learns by itself, out of its own individual persistent desire” (69)—in the manner of John Savage, for example. Lawrence prefers “effectual human beings” to mentally conscious human beings (68), and states that the goal of education is “the full and harmonious development of the four primary modes of consciousness” (68), primary, here, meaning something akin to basic, almost instinctual consciousness—even appetites. In this Lawrencian model of education, which he conceives as being like a mother encouraging her child to walk, “there should be no effort made to teach children to think, to have ideas. Only to lift them into dynamic activity” (78). Self-consciousness is clearly linked



with literacy in Lawrence's admonishing of parents: "We really can refrain from thrusting our children any more into those hot-beds of the self-conscious disease, schools. We really can prevent their eating much more of the tissues of leprosy, newspapers and books. For a time, there should be no compulsory teaching to read and write at all. *The great mass of humanity should never learn to read and write—never*" (87, emphasis original). Of girls in particular, Lawrence recommends "[a]nything to keep her busy, to prevent her reading and becoming self-conscious" (87). He goes so far as to assert that it is the duty of the State to protect its citizens from literacy and the consequent "ideas" and self-consciousness, "so that most individuals, under a wise government, would be most carefully protected from all vicious attempts to inject extraneous ideas into them" (Lawrence 76).

There are two—arguably three—models for education of children in *Brave New World*—"civilization's" programming, the Malpais tribal model,<sup>50</sup> and the autonomous learning model, represented by John, who only had Linda's limited knowledge as a guide and soon exceeded it—and none of these models is shown to be preferable. The Malpais model most closely resembles Lawrence's ideal, and it is possible that John, in his misery and self-consciousness, his longing both for literacy and primal experience, is a caricature of a Lawrencian type. *Brave New World* exposes the weaknesses in each

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<sup>50</sup> While the State's programming might seem an extreme version—or the logical extension—of Lawrence's recommendations because he invokes the government's "protection" of its citizens against "ideas," the Malpais version, with its emphasis on actions and activity—especially useful and productive activities, is also a version of a Lawrencian ideal. He compares "a savage in the state of nature" to a child, both of whom are "the most conventional of creatures" (*Fantasia* 68), and both of whom are unspoiled by "ideas," especially ideas from books and newspapers.

educational model, but does not present an alternative. Rather, the novel stands as a critique of the educational methods used by Leonard Bast and (to a degree) Septimus Smith, who lack guidance, and of State programs that restrict literacy for the good of the State—especially when the State exercises this control in the name of the people's happiness.

Literacy also colors sexual intimacy in the novel, though the effect of literacy on relationships is developed to a lesser degree in Huxley than in Lawrence, perhaps less than Woolf or Forster also. Lenina might be seen as preferring more literate men, as all of her partners seem to be Alphas. In particular, her attraction to John seems, unusually, to stray beyond the physical and towards monogamy (not, in itself, unusual for her) because of his "difference." More significant, however, is the way John's reading of Shakespeare influences his sexual understanding. The intolerance with which John treats Lenina might be seen as a critique of Shakespeare's portrayal of women,<sup>51</sup> if the novel itself did not indict the sexual license of the Brave New World. Lawrence would blame literacy in a sense—the ideas John has gained from reading, which have poisoned the dynamic self and prevented the development of the primary consciousness. It might be noted, however, that the text merely represents the morality of the Malpais, and that literacy itself should be a means for John to acquaint himself with others' beliefs and to objectify his experiences and beliefs in relation to others'.

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<sup>51</sup> Early critics did interpret *Brave New World* as a critique of Shakespeare; see for example Wilson, Robert H. "Brave New World as Shakespeare Criticism" (1946) in the *Shakespeare Association Bulletin*. See also Grushow, Ira "Brave New World and The Tempest" (1962) in *College English* and Meckier, Jerome "Shakespeare and Aldous Huxley" (1971) in *Shakespeare Quarterly*.

### Recommendations for a Literate Future

Literacy is linked with the life of the mind in *Brave New World*. Citizens of the Brave New World who are illiterate—who are without literacy or non-literate, as specified by their position in the caste system—have no individuality or any mental identity apart from the collective. This is not true, however, in the non-literate tribal culture of New Mexico, where non-literate peoples do, indeed, have individuality. The reader's insight into their thoughts, however, is limited. In the civilized society, where the citizens have effectively had their minds erased even before they developed, literacy seems tied to individuality and, in Mustapha Mond's phrase, to "the right to be unhappy" (240). Huxley does not suggest that literacy is the solution to all problems, however, or that the mere fact of literacy is a good in itself. Rather, he contributes to the Modernist discourse on literacy with a special brand of anxiety. He does not wish to limit individual access to literacy—does not wish to dictate in any way who should or should not read,<sup>52</sup> and does not seem concerned with mass literacy and whether it would degrade literary value in the manner of his Modernist contemporaries who, as John Carey claims in *The Intellectual and the Masses*, employed the modernist aesthetic to maintain the artist's elite position. Rather, Huxley presents possible benefits of reading along with his own particular anxieties about literacy: possible consequences of misreading, an example of very specific misreading, the limitations of functional literacy, and especially, the consequences that occur when a State limits the literacy of its citizens. Considered as a work of "literacy fiction," then, *Brave New World* can be

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<sup>52</sup> Contrast Lawrence's views in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Ch. 6-8.

discussed not only in terms of what ideas about literacy it dramatizes, but also according to what, if any, recommendations it makes about literacy within society or the life of the individual. Huxley's novel might be said to recommend that discourses of literacy not be abandoned—that on the individual and societal level, literacy deserves our consideration. Indeed, considering that the “saviors” of the *Brave New World* are likely to be the more literate—those who internalized literacy to a greater degree—the consideration of literacy and how it is regarded within society is elevated almost to the status of a moral imperative.

*Brave New World* presents a cautionary vision of literacy, as of other technologies, suggesting that literacy, unlike other technologies, must be used to its fullest possible extent—that is, it needs to be internalized—in order for it to serve its highest function as an enhancement of human life. To this purpose, the novel shows that purely functional literacy—like the literacy of John's mother, Linda—does not make its mark on interior consciousness, but merely assists in the performance of a task. A principle of Ong's literacy theory is that in order for literacy to alter human consciousness, it must be internalized at the individual level (56). The upper castes (Alphas and Betas) possess the ability to read and write, but this ability is limited to their social occupations and never transcends the mere literal or informational. There is no mediation of the information by those who inscribe it, and—as in the case of the note-takers—there does not seem to be a selection of what material to write down. In the upper castes, then, writing, rather than being a critical activity, is merely used as an aid to memory. In oral cultures, “knowledge” being that which can be remembered (Ong

33), while literate “knowledge” is that which can be accessed and analyzed, perhaps corrected. The emphasis on recording speech rather than processing and analyzing suggests that even Alpha members of the society have not internalized literacy, treating literacy as an extension of the memory, but that memory is only used for recall. While the comparison is not exact, since individuals in oral cultures (like the Malpais) have more autonomy than in the “civilization” of the novel, writing-as-memory function more in the manner of a semi-oral or transitional culture than of a literate culture. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates, often credited with the earliest recorded questioning and distrust of literacy, cites this feature—writing as memory aid—as weakening the human mind (Ong 79, Jahandarie). David Olson (1994) distinguishes between written language as memory aid, instead indicating that it “may serve an important epistemological function. Writing not only helps us remember what was thought and said but also invites us to see what was thought and said in a new way” (xv), presumably as a consequence of the distance between language and producer of language, and language and meaning. The lesson of *Brave New World* seems to be that, when used only as a memory aid and not as a critical or inventive activity, writing does indeed weaken—or at any rate, does not strengthen—the mind.

For society, the example of *Brave New World* cautions against the abandonment of literacy at any level. The State in the novel depends on literacy for the composition of its propaganda, in order to efficiently control the lives and happiness of its citizens and ensure consumption. The composition of propaganda requires literate individuals, but if reading could lead to deconditioning, to questioning, and to potential social instability,

then the undermining of the State itself might rest with literate individuals' ability to question the purpose of humanity. The inhabitants of the islands, who we must, in the context of the novel, assume to be more than functionally literate—as Mustapha Mond himself—are “the people who, for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life. All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own. Every one, in a word, who's any one” (227). Mustapha represents exile to an island as an attractive prospect, though he chose power and the governance of the stability of civilization instead. In his portrayal of intelligent, self-aware, literate Alphas who “aren't satisfied with orthodoxy” and have “independent ideas of their own” and are a danger to the State, Huxley seems to agree with John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* when he discusses “persons of genius” in “On Individuality.”<sup>53</sup>

Writing in the nineteenth century, Mill observes that “society has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences” (“Of Individuality”). Mill's critique of his own society becomes the principle on which the society of *Brave New World* is patterned.<sup>54</sup> More in the manner of Lawrence than Huxley, Mill treats

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<sup>53</sup> Though Mill is very characteristically a *Victorian* philosopher, Mill and Matthew Arnold are some of the founders of the discourse on public literacy, to which the Modernists contributed rather than initiating it. See Altick for an explanation of the discourses on the reader in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>54</sup> In showing the logical consequences of restriction of literacy by socio-political entities, Huxley echoes the consequences of the restriction of individuality according to Mill:

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation

individuality in terms of “energy,” though mental or intellectual energy—the exercising of one’s critical faculties—is also essential. According to Mill, the individual with “energy” and fully-realized mental faculties is essential to the development of society because through questioning and agitation, that person forces society to advance.

Namely, “[t]here is always need of persons not only to discover new truths, and point out when what were once truths are true no longer, but also to commence new practices, and set the example of more enlightened conduct, and better taste and sense in human life.

This cannot well be gainsaid by anybody who does not believe that the world has already attained perfection in all its ways and practices” (Mill “Of Individuality”). Mustapha Mond, presumably, either believes that the world has attained perfection, or (as is more likely) believes that stability—particularly stability with him in control—is preferable to perfection. However, insofar as *Brave New World* is a cautionary tale, it cautions

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to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it. Among the works of man, which human life is rightly employed in perfecting and beautifying, the first in importance surely is man himself. Supposing it were possible to get houses built, corn grown, battles fought, causes tried, and even churches erected and prayers said, by machinery—by automatons in human form—it would be a considerable loss to exchange for these automatons even the men and women who at present inhabit the more civilized parts of the world, and who assuredly are but starved specimens of what nature can and will produce. Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing. (Mill “Of Individuality”)

against uniformity and, like Mill, champions individuality of a sort—*literate* individuality—though those who might direct humanity toward higher purposes than the satisfaction of the citizens’ own appetites and continuation of the State are exiled or choose conformity and power. Literacy, then, does not solve the problems of the society, nor will it in the bleak and fixed vision of the future represented by *Brave New World*. Helmholz and his peers, with their desire for something better—in his case, to create better *literature*<sup>55</sup>—have the potential to influence change. Instead, because of his discontent, Helmholz receives exile, but plans to use the difficulty of his new life as material for his writing; in this way, his literacy will also give meaning to his situation.<sup>56</sup>

In depriving those who do not need even this basic literacy of the capacity to achieve literacy by altering their genetic makeup and gestation environment, producing, for example, “Epsilon Semi-Morons,” the State solves the problem of what function purely utilitarian literacy serves for the individual and society. The State in *Brave New World* has wrestled with one of the issues that early education theorists addressed—namely, what purpose literacy serves to the individual. In response, the State not only removes the opportunity for literacy or restricts the kind of literacy achieved by the lower castes, it removes from these beings the ability to achieve literacy. The “problem” of the reading habits of the lower classes was a matter of interest to intellectuals of the

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<sup>55</sup> Perhaps in the manner of the literary elite who were Huxley’s contemporaries.

<sup>56</sup> Compare Bernard Marx, who writes hypnopædic slogans—shorter works than the “feelies” composed by Helmholz. Bernard, unlike Helmholz, also suffers from unattractiveness in general, perhaps the product of poor embryo management. Both figures are unhappy and long for more, though Bernard seems content with women & notoriety when he achieves them, while Helmholz longs for true art, for which he has a seemingly instinctive sense, recognizing the comparative value of *Othello* over the feelies.



early twentieth century, as Forster's *Howards End* demonstrates. Huxley suggests that, whatever one might think about the reading habits of the lower classes, to restrict their reading is to prevent them from being fully human.

Although *Brave New World* portrays the restriction of literacy unfavorably, Huxley does not present it as an unqualified good. The novel demonstrates, first of all, that it is not through mere functional literacy, which I have defined through the novel, as “the restriction of one’s reading ability or habits to tasks that enable one’s daily existence,” that literacy helps develop consciousness, self-awareness and the critical faculties. Huxley also introduces the idea that the self-aware individual, like Helmholtz Watson and Bernard Marx in particular, are not necessarily *happy*. Rather, being at odds with the contentedness of others and questioning the purpose of human existence produces a profound gloom in both men. Helmholtz, however, is willing to channel this gloom into intellectual activity, and finds satisfaction in the prospect of having unpleasant experiences to fuel his writing. His model of literacy yields the only potential hope for the salvation of civilization in the novel—and it is an isolated hope. As far as the relationship between literate individuals and society, it is clear that literate individuals cause problems, and must be contained—must be made to conform, or must face exile. Thus, it is not only the reading habits of the lower classes that the State seeks to control. John Savage, as one who has ideas that are opposed to the State, is thus placed admirably to make trouble, to undermine the State, and to emerge as hero and as a thoroughly likeable figure. He is not thoroughly likeable, however, in part due to his intolerance, which is supported by his half-understood and decontextualized quotations

from Shakespeare. John, who should have the potential to be a hero, functions instead as a model of how not to read.

As the most recognizable literate participant in the main action of the novel, John is well positioned to be a kind of hero. To the reader, his reading represents arguably the best literary products of English culture. The fact that John's sacred scriptural text is Shakespeare is ironic given the ambiguities and textual anomalies of much of Shakespeare's writing. Thus, John's literacy is called into question immediately by his reliance on a text that is not necessarily authoritative, that contains material meant to be performed as entertainment or even critically analyzed rather than read and internalized. John Savage demonstrates a litany of literacy failures: misreading, shallow reading, reading for dogmatic reasons, reading singlemindedly, reading at cultural odds with the author, reading out of context. . . . He uses his literacy the way the *Brave New World* uses hypnopaedia—the quotes he repeats are etched in his mind in a way that prevents him from evaluating them; he seems capable of repetition only. John fails as a literate hero because he has failed to internalize literacy; rather, he has internalized a text that he is unable to critically analyze but uses to justify his judgment according to tribal standards of nobility and morality. Finally, his inability to recognize and cope with differing social codes make him lash out and finally commit murder. His literacy, then, allows him to cope as long as the text and situation agree with his internalized moral code. He is unprepared for change in situation—particularly a situation alien to his experience—since the text (he believes) reinforces his moral code. Literacy, which

should take John beyond his experience, does not operate to its fullest potential in the mind of John Savage.

### ***Brave New World* and Literacy Theory**

There are several points within the novel which, when analyzed according to the method outlined in this study, using literacy theory to examine scenes of literate activity and to determine the work's overall attitude toward literacy, suggest critiques of literacy theory, or ways in which literary studies might enhance literacy theory. First, *Brave New World* suggests that the characteristics ascribed to literacy are not absolute, but exist in varying degrees in individuals and societies or cultures. Ong, summarizing the results of a study by Carrothers (1959), concludes that "it takes only a moderate degree of literacy to make a tremendous difference in thought processes" (50). However, the examples of John Savage, his mother Linda, and the inhabitants of "civilization" in the novel more generally suggest that as literacy is internalized to a greater or lesser degree, the changes in consciousness that are associated with literacy develop accordingly.

John and Linda are both literate, but John has internalized the oral culture of the Malpais, which affects his acquisition and use of literacy. Linda has been taught literacy of a sort by the State, but her conditioning does not allow her to use it to its fullest extent. Neither of these individuals are able, therefore, to internalize literacy, and while John possesses some of the mental benefits of literacy, Linda—like most of the inhabitants of her society—does not. By contrast, Helmholtz Watson has internalized literacy to a greater degree, and so experiences more of its benefits than any of the

characters of the novel, as has Mustapha Mond. Mustapha functions in a role prescribed by Lawrence in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, having chosen to rule and to work to maintain the State and the happiness of its citizens. Lawrence writes that to allay the suffering of the many, “[t]he secret is, to commit into the hands of the sacred few the responsibility which now lies like torture on the mass. Let the few, the leaders, be increasingly responsible for the whole. And let the mass be free: free, save for choice of leaders” (Lawrence *Fantasia* 88). These leaders would also be the educated, literate few. The question of depth of internalization of literacy and the development of self-awareness occupies a section, “The inward turn: consciousness and the text,” of the final chapter of Ong’s *Orality and Literacy*. Speaking about individuals and societies interchangeably, Ong says that “[s]elf-consciousness is coextensive with humanity: everyone who can say ‘I’ has an acute sense of self. But reflectiveness and articulateness about the self takes time to grow” (178). While Ong admits that “the oral word. . . first illuminates consciousness with articulate language, that first divides the subject and predicate and relates them to one another, and that ties human beings to one another in society,” writing “introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more conscious interaction between persons. Writing is consciousness raising” (179). The process of becoming self-aware begins with the (oral) introduction of language, but develops further with the introduction and practice of literacy. Because self-awareness fostered by literacy is developmental, it increases incrementally (though it can not be measured). *Brave New World* foregrounds the differences of levels of internalization of literacy—and,

consequently, of consciousness—that can exist even within the same society, though in the novel this is regulated by social and genetic engineering.

Modernist writers suggest frequently that the way of reading and what material one reads hold significance, and that literacy alone, while valuable, is not sufficient to fully develop one's mental faculties. It is perhaps not the task of literacy theory to determine the differences between types of reading material, but there is a clear distinction implied between the signs and manuals of "civilization" in *Brave New World* and the non-practical literary and philosophical texts represented by Shakespeare, Cardinal Newman, and others in the final chapters of *Brave New World*. In Ong's work, examples of written or printed texts are drawn from literature and philosophy, particularly in the final chapters which serve as a culmination of his theories and which recommend areas for further development. Ong's conception of literacy is based on literary and philosophical texts rather than on lists, manuals, and labels, functional types of print or writing that surround an individual and permeate his or her consciousness in literate societies without working to develop that consciousness. Shakespeare differs from the *The Chemical and Bacteriological Conditioning of the Embryo*. A shopping list differs from a poem. The newspaper—vilified by Lawrence—differs from a street sign, or from any of the previous examples. *Brave New World* does not elaborate on the nature of the differences between the texts, unless to suggest that Shakespeare—and high art generally—depend on social instability. However, it seems that John's mind is developed further by contact with Shakespeare than it would be if he were restricted to instruction manuals.

Along with the variety of reading materials in *Brave New World*, there exist various methods of reading—reading for pleasure is suggested, though even John does not receive pleasure in the sense provided by recreational reading. Manuals enable and require only utilitarian reading—reading to yield a result, usually the completion of a task. Shirley Brice Heath explores more “oral” modes of reading in “Protean Shapes in Literacy Events,” noting that in one of the towns that form the focus of her study,

On all of [the] occasions for reading and writing, individuals saw literacy as an occasion for social activities: women shopped together, discussed local credit opportunities and products, and sales; men negotiated the meaning of tax forms, brochures on new cars, and political flyers. The evening newspaper was read on the front porch, and talk about the news drifted from porch to porch. . . . The only occasions for solitary reading were those in which elderly men and women read their Bible or Sunday School materials alone, or school-age children sat alone to read a library book or a school assignment. In short, written information almost never stood alone in Trackton; it was reshaped and reworded into an oral mode. (Heath 95)

In Heath’s examples, the uses of literacy are social—more akin to standard definitions of orality—but the reading materials are primarily geared toward the delivery of information rather than communication of ideas or even stories, as in literary texts. Thus, neither the ways of reading represented by the town or the materials being read

relate to the type of literacy assumed in large part by Ong's study—which, indeed, is one of the points of Heath's article. *Brave New World* portrays both utilitarian or information-carrying texts and non-utilitarian texts. It further suggests that there are modes of reading appropriate for each text—Shakespeare ought to be read in a manner befitting Shakespeare, and not as a semi-divinely-inspired, mystical text; nor should *The Chemical and Bacteriological Conditioning of the Embryo* be read in a manner befitting Shakespeare. An insufficiently literate reader, according *Brave New World* as well as *Howards End*, will not know how to properly treat a given text, and though in Forster this may be seen as dictated by culture, Huxley presents it as an absolute. It remains for literacy theorists to take a position on whether there are different ways of reading texts, and to theorize the effects of different ways of reading on the consciousness, or to declare that all literacy is equally beneficial.

Related to ways or modes of reading is the actual practice of reading and writing—the idea that reading and writing must be *practiced*, preferably in certain ways, in order to take root in the psyche—and that literacy must be practiced in a supportive context. In *Brave New World*, citizens of the upper class possess the ability to read and write, but they rarely do so because of their conditioning. With rare exceptions, the citizens have not internalized their literacy. The difference between Helmholtz—or even John or Bernard Marx—and the average citizen is that Helmholtz practices his literacy frequently—composing feelies. He is separated by citizens such as the Alpha plus note-takers because his practice of literacy is inventive, as is Bernard's to a lesser degree. Inventiveness in composing text along with frequency of literate acts might be

considered markers within the novel for an advanced internalization of literacy.

Understanding metaphor might be another marker, as John seems to misunderstand—or at least misuse—Shakespeare’s metaphor for life as a “tale told by an idiot,” using the phrase in a literal sense instead of in a way that indicates understanding of the metaphor. John’s reading is frequent, but not necessarily critical and analytical, and unlike Helmholtz, he does not engage in composition of texts. Though his reading is not functional, it is also not critical or analytical—it is not a deep or sympathetic literacy, in the manner of Forster’s “boy” in “The Celestial Omnibus,” for example.

John’s situation in particular draws attention to the necessity that a reader have a supportive context for reading—society, culture, and family—in order to internalize literacy. John’s context is lacking in “everyday” literacy—not allowing for commonplace literate acts—and in a literate cultural background. Merely the existence of a dictionary would have been of inestimable use in John’s acquisition of literacy. A further distinction can be made about context by examining the “civilized society” of *Brave New World*, which is largely lacking in what might be considered “culture”—loosely defined as the creative or intellectual products of human civilization or society. In the novel, the Brave New World society is literate. The upper castes can read, and writing on signs “announces” information. Many of the tasks performed by the upper castes—tasks essential to the continuance of the State and society—require reading and writing. The society itself is text based to a large degree, as one senses that reading and writing form the basis for many of the activities and technologies of the society, such as the “feelies.” However, there is no literate cultural context. The two (culture and



society) generally exist together, but not necessarily, as the cases cited by Shirley Brice Heath might suggest. The culture of the town of Trackton is largely orally based, though the society is certainly a literate society. Though the distinction might be a fine one, in the case of a literate *culture*, literacy might be considered integral to shared cultural knowledge—like the expectation that everyone has familiarity with Shakespeare. A culturally supported literacy environment is essential for cultural capital theories to work. John receives no benefits from his knowledge of Shakespeare other than purely personal/emotional benefits because his society lacks a literate cultural context.<sup>57</sup> The cultural context of the Malpais tribe is oral. Societal literacy, by contrast, might be defined as having more to do with the uses of print in a society—perhaps more akin to functional literacy. Literacy may be determined to be internalized on a societal level when literacy is taken for granted—signs with words only, no symbols, a proliferation of written messages, especially for basic or essential communication. The Brave New World is a literate society in a sense, but has no trace of literate culture. However, there is no trace of an oral culture either. Also, the society cannot be said to have “internalized” literacy, and while many of the inhabitants are technically literate—having literate ability—they do not read, and so are illiterate in a sense. Because they have no oral culture to replace the literate culture that they do not possess, only

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<sup>57</sup> A “literate cultural context” should be considered distinct from “cultural literacy,” which may have much or little to do with reading and writing. Although for some, knowledge of Shakespeare, for example, or key events of history—Western or otherwise, might be considered relevant to being “culturally literate,” while for others, knowledge of certain films or popular music might be more relevant. Indeed, “cultural literacy” might be considered subject to various agendas or priorities, and so ever-shifting.

hypnopædic slogans and conditioning, the inhabitants of the World State might be considered inferior to the Malpais “savages,” who have a more developed sense of self in relation to their society than do the State’s citizens. Even non- or illiterate people, then, can not be judged according to the same standards. It is interesting to note also that *Brave New World* problematizes the connection, for which literacy theory has been faulted, between literacy and civilization, on the one hand, and non-literacy/orality and savage society, on the other. Both of the seemingly dichotomous societies in *Brave New World* possess elements of both “civilization” and “savagery,” according to some definition.

Several questions about literacy are raised by the portrayal of literacy in *Brave New World*. The text-based nature of the society itself, its technologies and media combined with the relative lack of internalized literacy or recognizably literate citizens suggests the question of what exactly constitutes—or does not constitute—secondary orality. It is clear that the “feelies” are text based, but they rely primarily on visual, auditory and sensory effects. Though, presumably, they can be replayed like films, it is less certain whether they are subject to “backward scanning”—through rewinding, for example. The “hypnopædic slogans” are more difficult to classify, as are the “Solidarity Services,” designed to resemble the rituals of oral cultures, or perhaps liturgies of literate cultures with the texts removed. The treatment of the subconscious mind, “written on” by the sleep teaching, suggests the question of what literacy metaphors can teach us—here, literacy used as a metaphor rather than metaphors used for literacy. Specifically, using the “blank slate” metaphor for the mind—making the mind into a text—and

having the State, by means of hypnopædia, *write on* the mind suggest that there is a realm of the mind that cannot be questioned, as writing—autonomous discourse—can not be questioned. However, the mind-as-text metaphor might also suggest the ability that the literate mind possesses, according to literacy theory, to examine itself in the manner of a text.

Perhaps the most profound question raised by *Brave New World*—one which has the potential to bring together ways of thinking about literacy from across various disciplines, is from whence derives the use of literacy as a coping device. Like many works in this study, *Brave New World* asks why literacy, in certain contexts, allows individuals to cope with difficult situations, or else why it is that individuals believe that—or want—literacy to provide a coping device. Further, one might ask what properties of literacy make it suitable as a coping device, whether subject matter alone yields consolation and mental courage, or whether the processes of reading and writing themselves promote the type of mental strength and stamina necessary to withstand difficult situations in life. The novel suggests that there is some quality of literate activity that allows the individual to objectively view his or her own situation as compared to others' experience, as in Helmholtz's understanding of Bernard and the "Savage" or his ability to put his own exile into perspective and resolve to use it to his advantage.

Finally, *Brave New World* reveals the ways in which literacy theory can inform literary theory, specifically reader-response theory. In his conclusion to *Orality and*

*Literacy*, Ong anticipates a dialogue between literacy theory and reader-response theory, noting that

Reader-response criticism is intimately aware that writing and reading differ from oral communication, and in terms of absence: the reader is normally absent when the writer writes and the writer is normally absent when the reader reads, whereas in oral communication speaker and hearer are present to one another. [. . .] Little has thus far been done, however, to understand reader response in terms of what is now known of the evolution of noetic processes from primary orality through residual orality to high literacy. Readers whose norms and expectancies for formal discourse are governed by a residually oral mindset relate to a text quite different from readers whose sense of style is radically textual. (Ong 171)

In John Savage, Huxley portrays a reader whose “norms and expectancies for formal discourse are governed” by a primarily oral mindset rather than residually oral. The effect of this primary orality on John’s psyche seems to be to limit his entry into the text to the personal. *Brave New World* proposes, and reader-response criticism might support or contradict—that reading/interpreting literature according to one’s experience is a consequence of residual orality, since the oral mindset interprets language as directly connected to the human lifeworld. By extension, the individual reads the text as reflecting on his or her experience instead of the individual reflecting on the text. In

*Brave New World*, reading according to one's experience—so that the text is made to reflect and reinforce one's experiences—emerges as a deeply flawed method. Critical reading might take one out of oneself and beyond one's experience. Finally, in Huxley's novel, one does not “cope” simply by finding oneself in a text.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Though not a Modernist text in terms of its philosophical underpinnings—or even its overall aesthetic (though it shares techniques of Modernism), Huxley's *Brave New World* proves essential for this study of literacy and Modernist anxiety both because it epitomizes one type of literacy fiction and because it answers or challenges many of the Modernist fears about literacy. The present study engages theoretically with the implicit authorial discourse on the acts of writing and (especially) reading in early twentieth-century British literature, with textual attitudes toward literacy, arguments about literacy, theories of the place of the reader within society, and theories of the social, psychological, and cognitive functions of the acts of reading. Modernist writing in particular depends on the reader's willingness and ability to decode the difficult Modernist aesthetic that depends on literacy to represent the workings of the mind, though mental processes often defy textual representation. In this study, only *Mrs. Dalloway* attempts to represent the mind textually, though all of the texts acknowledge the ways that literacy influences individual consciousness (for better or worse), enhancing the basic mental life of even the "average" individual. While most hint that literacy is the key to a fully realized existence, Woolf, Forster, and Lawrence suggest numerous problems with literacy's positive influence on the life of the mind, problems that mostly involve social, political, and cultural influences, the fictional readers' faulty

uses of or regard for literacy, or the readers' faulty methods of acquiring or practicing literacy.

Historically, starting with the rise of popular literacy in the nineteenth century, intellectuals and social theorists identified numerous "dangers" of reading for the masses: that the masses would become discontented, that the consumption of literature was counterproductive, that certain literature was dangerous for women. In the previous chapters, I have identified numerous sources of Modernist anxiety about the reading habits of the general public and the individual. Modernists outside of this study, like Ezra Pound, were famously concerned that the reader would be inadequately prepared for the Modernist literary works she or he encountered. In his works, D. H. Lawrence expresses fears of the emasculating effects of hyper-literacy and of literacy's ineffectiveness to help attain individual happiness. E. M. Forster also represents reservations about literacy as a path to happiness and self-fulfillment, not only because literacy may be misused—as in the case of Lucy Honeychurch—but also because of cultural literacy practices and social obstacles to literacy. Additionally, Forster represents fears that literacy will be weakened with the entry of the working classes into the literate populace, in the person of Leonard Bast for example, or the petit bourgeois, like the Honeychurches. Leonard Bast and the Honeychurches, along with Septimus Smith and the Morel family, are examples of relative newcomers to the literate populace in terms of social history—distinct from those who are born into literate aristocracies and so attain their cultural capital through inheritance rather than by way of education, in

the manner of a Woolf or a Huxley (though Virginia Woolf's education was complicated by her gender) rather than a Lawrence.

Woolf and Forster acknowledge the often debilitating obstacles that working class individuals face when striving to achieve advanced literacy. Lawrence further speculates that hyper literacy might weaken the individual's natural vitality by separating the individual from his (or her) animal nature. Lawrence and Forster share with Woolf many anxieties that speak to the characteristics of literacy that have been observed by literacy theorists: that, removed from context, writing may be misunderstood; that writing is decontextualized, hence, cannot clarify its own meaning; or that writing makes the writer vulnerable because of its separation from the writer and externalization of the writer's thoughts. Several instances in *Mrs. Dalloway* also anticipate the representation of literacy in Forster's and Lawrence's texts. The relationships between Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton or her husband Richard, like the relationship between Helen Schlegel and Leonard Bast, anticipate Lawrence's fuller treatment of the connection between literacy and intimacy; in Woolf as in Lawrence, literacy fosters and troubles intimate relationships. Woolf also sexualizes literacy in the case of Peter, relating literate acts to the individual's sexuality, though Woolf represents Peter as emasculated because of his inability to write rather than by his advanced literacy, as in Lawrence.

Though all of the works in this study express anxieties about literacy's uses and effects, *Brave New World* illustrates most clearly, with less ambiguity even than Forster's fantasies, that the benefits of literacy—individual literacy, cultural literacy, or



societal literacy, each of which may be considered separate from the others—compensate for the difficulties of attaining or maintaining a literate consciousness. While the undisputedly Modernist works, the products of a hyper-literate aesthetic and philosophic movement, argue for the tempering of literacy, which has the potential to benefit or harm the individual, or merely to serve no purpose, *Brave New World* responds to the threat of societal and cultural regulation of literacy—perhaps even to its regulation by the literate elites of the society—theorizing the consequences of restriction or denial of literacy. In the context of an early twentieth-century discourse on literacy analyzed through the works of four authors, Huxley’s work proves valuable as a response to Forster’s portrayal of literacy as key to a system of cultural capital, as it would later be termed by Bourdieu.

In chapter two, I discuss how Forster’s portrayal of attitudes toward literacy in “The Celestial Omnibus” and “Other Kingdom” may be productively understood in terms of cultural capital theory. Forster dramatizes the anxiety that literature would be misused by being regarded purely or primarily as a means to acquisition of cultural capital. In “The Celestial Omnibus,” “Other Kingdom,” and *Howards End*, as in Lawrence’s “Shades of Spring” and *Sons and Lovers*, characters seem trapped, compelled or selfishly inclined to use literacy and literary knowledge to gain social standing, though their efforts often fail. Huxley’s *Brave New World* enters into the discourse on literacy and cultural capital by dramatizing circumstances under which cultural capital would be impossible to attain. Interestingly enough, the literacy dystopia of *Brave New World* invokes trappings of capitalism while portraying an extreme

consequence of Marxist thought. In order to insure the existence of the State, continued consumption, and the happiness of everyone, literacy is severely restricted in *Brave New World*—to the purely functional, and what is necessary to create the society's entertainment and rituals. The upper castes are literate so that they may learn and fulfill their jobs, and because some literate individuals are necessary for the planning and running of the State; however, while these circumstances are adequate for the society to be defined as literate, the individuals who are literate read and write on only the most basic and functional levels; only a few could be considered to have “advanced” literacy, and perhaps only the head of the State might be considered “hyper-literate.” In no sense is the culture of the *Brave New World* a literate culture, and in fact, the society does not possess any of the characteristics that we attribute to culture. In such a society, in which textual knowledge is obsolete, in which there are no “texts” to carry the necessary “currency,” cultural capital is proved a useless theory. It may in fact be that the only kind of society or situation in which literacy and literature cannot be “capitalized” and used for social advancement is one in which literacy does not resemble anything like what it has come to represent within Western societies—one in which the texts of a culture have been abandoned for so long that it is impossible to recreate a context in which they had meaning or held implicit worth—and one in which literacy holds no value in society.

Presumably, in outlining cultural capital theory, Bourdieu is critiquing the commodification (reification for Adorno) of culture and its products. Similarly, Forster laments the use of literature (a cultural product created and accessed by virtue of

literacy) as capital to gain entrance into society. Lawrence depicts the same phenomenon, seemingly without critique. In order for cultural capital to work, there has to be implicit recognition of the worth of the capital and ability to attain that capital. Democratic access to literacy, the ability to attain the literary form of cultural capital, provides one part of the equation, while implicit recognition of the worth of the capital—here “literature,” variously defined (especially for Forster) but read with seriousness—is what the writers in this study sought to uphold, with the possible exception of Lawrence. To dismantle the system requires removal of the impulse to commodify, which would require removing the goal—social advancement—or devaluing the capital. *Brave New World* portrays both.

Implicit denial of the worth of the capital would mean that literacy would have no cultural value; it is difficult to argue for the devaluation of reading and writing, or of certain literary products, though is an issue relevant to reevaluation of literary canons. Promoting relativism in curricula, for example, suggests an equivalence that has not previously existed in literary studies, since some texts—Shakespeare, for example—have always been held in higher regard either because they met or exceeded standards of excellence during their own or subsequent or, more likely, their own *and* subsequent time periods, or because of their influence on other literary works. Having said this, there have always been trends in literary value, a theme Forster acknowledges with the boy’s vs. Mr. Bons’s reading choices in “The Celestial Omnibus,” or with the Schlegels’ commentary on Leonard Bast’s self-study program. Other Modernists would assess the relative worth of their own and their contemporaries’ works as compared to works of

Classical or then-canonical literature. As what defines “serious” literature changes, there is a devaluation/inflation of cultural capital because vast numbers of literary works are considered equally valuable according to varied criteria. Literary cultural capital is further devalued as substitutions for literature gain popularity over literature, prompting renewed concerns about literacy in culture. In some sense, the value of literature and literacy in society may be gauged by its use as cultural capital.

According to Cuddy-Keane, Modernists were responding to a decrease in the quality and pervasiveness of reading—what I term a “weakening” of the reading public—rather than a proliferation of reading, and so are “promoting and defending” serious reading. However, regardless of whether they fear a reduction in serious reading or an increase in mundane or low quality reading, they respond by critiquing the act of reading, social uses of reading, and even the necessity of reading—though no writer advises abandoning literacy, and only Lawrence comes close. Paradoxically, unless they are speaking as hyper-literate elites to other hyper-literate elites, as they are usually represented, the Modernists’ implied discourses on literacy depend on the literacy of the reader—to what extent their own critics and readers (about whom they expressed anxieties) could comprehend and would respond to the portrayals of literate acts in their works. In their critiques of the reader implied through portrayal of literate acts, it is useful to consider whether the character in a given text represents the reader as he or she exists in society or as an ideal “type” of the reader—that is, whether the portrait is meant as a critique or a model for the actual reader to emulate or to which the reader should aspire.

With the exception of John Savage, the readers in the works covered by this study already possess literacy, which they have acquired in the context of a literate society that boasts a literate culture. What they primarily strive to achieve, then, insofar as their experience of literacy is a journey, is “advanced” or even “hyper” literacy, which I have discussed in many of the chapters in this study. In most cases, there is a transition from a relatively “low” or immature state of literacy to literacy that is, in some sense, more advanced. Few characters remain static, and of these, most are portrayed negatively—Mr. Bons, for example, Cecil Vyse, or Inskip in Forster. Most of the upper class men in *Mrs. Dalloway*, whose literacy is assumed because of their gender, remain relatively static. In Lawrence, the illiterate remain illiterate while the literate advance, but at the cost of their vitality. The Schlegels also remain static, but they are the literate elite—literacy bluebloods—and have no reason to pursue higher literacy than the advanced level they already possess. Literacy, then, is a progression. The reader does not remain the same, but advances, or attempts to advance, though what it means for a reader to advance varies. Obstacles to literate pursuits suggest the futility of trying in certain circumstances—Leonard Bast’s situation, or Miss Beaumont’s—but do not de-value the attempts. Indeed, in Lawrence’s “Shades of Spring,” it is the successful acquisition of advanced literacy that emasculates rather than obstacles to its acquisition, and the pursuit of advanced literacy is de-valored by its separation of individuals from each other and of the physical self from the intellectual self.

In general, women are more able to adapt literacy to their purposes, perhaps because they do not have the same social expectations for literacy as men. In *Mrs.*

*Dalloway*, for example, Sally Seton uses literacy to help form ideas and to foster an intimate connection with Clarissa. Her reading does not help her to advance socially, and she does not expect it to do so. Rather, her reading makes her stand out from her presumed social class—from which she is already separate because of her ambiguous family ties. Both her manner and her reading make her more masculine, though she does not gain the benefits of literacy that men overwhelmingly expect to gain in the literature of this period. In Forster's works, the Schlegels enjoy intellectual entertainment from their literacy, including their discussion circles and their engagement with Leonard Bast. Lucy Honeychurch must learn how best to use literacy; her efforts to allow literature to substitute for life and her willingness to allow Cecil to educate her into a "cultured" wife in the manner of Harcourt with Miss Beaumont represent a passive acceptance of others' definitions of literacy and its uses. She is liberated from conventional uses of literacy—as a substitute for experience and as a means to acquisition of cultural capital—by George Emerson, who partially rejects literacy's ability to solve life's questions. Miss Beaumont's reading is judged to be useless, though Harcourt uses it to try to form her into an ideal English wife. Nevertheless, quite apart from social uses of literacy, in which she has little interest, her reading proves useful in a purely fantastic way as her means to escape from Harcourt's domination. In Lawrence's works, Hilda and Miriam have little to gain socially from advanced literacy, though Hilda wishes to determine for herself what can be gained through literacy—by manipulating her former lover, Syson. Miriam accepts an intimate relationship as a by-product of her pursuit of advanced literacy, but though she expresses dissatisfaction with her social position, she does not

use literacy as a tangible means to escape her situation. Among these women, Miriam's position is closest to a literacy "failure," though, with qualitatively and quantitatively different aspirations than a Leonard Bast, her "failure" is merely to remain in the status quo. Overall, the female characters in the works suggest redefinition of successful uses of literacy, which may remove one from masculine-defined social norms. By contrast, only Ford in "Other Kingdom" illustrates a conventional (masculine?) kind of literate triumph.

The question of whether a character succeeds or fails in his or her pursuit of advanced literacy suggests an evaluation of the goals of that pursuit. In many cases, social advancement—the pursuit of cultural capital—is indeed the primary goal. The purpose of literacy in the lives of individuals as represented in the fictions of Woolf, Forster, Lawrence and Huxley occupy a continuum from the "pure enjoyment" model—a kind of "art for art's sake" approach to literacy—to the almost purely "practical" or utilitarian models. The utilitarian model of literacy culminates with the figure of Mustapha Mond in Huxley's *Brave New World*, who uses advanced literacy in order to achieve power, control others—notably, their access to literacy—and so protect the stability of the State. Among the authors in this study, only Forster attempts to portray a pure, unfettered enjoyment of reading in his portrayal of the nameless boy in "The Celestial Omnibus," perhaps because only childhood's innocence permits reading that is untainted by social, cultural, and economic forces. Even Miss Beaumont, another innocent who attempts a practice of literacy for the sheer delight of experiencing the text, is constrained by Harcourt who, along with Cecil Vyse from Forster's *A Room With*

*A View*, occupies the opposite end of the continuum as one who would use literacy to transform his intended bride into a model of culture so that she (and he) will fit more readily into the upper crust of society. This might be termed the *Pygmalion* model of literacy as cultural capital.<sup>58</sup> Woolf shows Clarissa Dalloway using reading as a form of relaxation, while Forster also shows the Schlegels seeking pleasure and entertainment from literacy and from their proposed literacy-based philanthropic activities rather than using literacy to attain more tangible benefits. Helen and Margaret Schlegel's further use of literacy as a basis for their intellectual activity and engagement with ideas is shared in Forster's works by George Emerson (at least initially); in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the basis for Sally Seton's reading is her engagement with intellectual ideas and critique of society, while in *Sons and Lovers*, Mrs. Morel (before her marriage) prized her reputation as a literate young woman who could engage in lively intellectual discussions. She continues this use of literacy after her marriage, when her children begin to grow up, by joining a Women's Guild.

Several characters in these Modernist works use literacy for pursuits that promise not only to yield artistic or intellectual pleasure, but also to yield some kind of (more or less tangible) artistic or intellectual product. The most tangible of the proposed outcomes is Helmholtz Watson's aspiration to write the kind of literature that Shakespeare wrote. This artistic impulse—an impulse toward creation of culture—is recognized as a “higher” use of literacy even within the context of the dystopian society. It is only because of his status as an Alpha-plus that he is able to feel dissatisfaction with

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<sup>58</sup> Though it has been argued otherwise, Eliza's education in Shaw's *Pygmalion* is not explicitly literacy-based. See Eldred and Mortensen's “Reading Literacy Narratives.”



his literacy-based work—creating substitutes for art and literature—and to propose the development of a literate culture. Helmholtz aspires to something close to “literacy for its own sake”; basically, he desires to enjoy the inherent fruits of literacy. The critiques of society and culture implied by Sally Seton’s and George Emerson’s uses of literacy suggest the necessity of social change—a tangible benefit. Similarly, Ford in “Other Kingdom” and Tibby Schlegel, the brother of Helen and Margaret, have a more institutionalized venue for literate critique of culture as university students, though one that is more insulated. Ford finds in this environment the consolation (derived, one assumes, from books) for his expulsion from his guardian’s house and his loss of Miss Beaumont. The use of literacy as a tool of analysis or critique aids John Savage, who reads in order to contextualize and understand his existence.

For many characters, literacy is a means to participation in culture, not merely a means to the use of culture as capital. Such diverse characters as Septimus Smith, Lucy Honeychurch, Leonard Bast, Helen & Margaret Schlegel and William Morel participate in culture or seek to participate in culture through literacy—using books as tools to an understanding of culture, or reading in order to understand and appreciate the products of culture or the materials that give one the designation “cultured.” These characters achieve varying degrees of success or failure, but success or failure for these characters is not measured by financial gain or, in most cases, by social gain. Though Leonard Bast would presumably welcome a change in social situation and financial improvement, these are not his primary reasons for pursuit of literacy. Thus, the use of literacy as a

means to culture may be considered as distinct from the use of literacy as a means to acquire cultural capital, which is characterized by its near-quantifiable product.

A trend emerges in representation of literacy in twentieth-century literature as more sympathetic characters employ literacy for introspective ends rather than for personal gain. Forster's "boy" and Miss Beaumont find escape through literacy, though their escape entails physical separation from physical reality, albeit in the context of allegorical fantasies. Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Smith, Ford, Leonard Bast, Mrs. Morel, John Savage find in literate activity a means to cope and a tool for self-preservation. Helmholtz Watson seeks a form of self-fulfillment currently denied. Though they are directed in part by cultural norms, Septimus Smith, Lucy Honeychurch, Leonard Bast and Syson desire a self-improvement that is distinct from class mobility. Miriam wishes to know that she has expanded her potential, though it is uncertain what she will make of this vague potential; she further wishes to accomplish educational goals denied to women, and to gain a measure of equality with her brothers. John Savage desires nothing short of contextualization and understanding of his existence. While the uses of literacy privileged by the texts in this study are not entirely non-utilitarian, uses of literacy that yield personal satisfaction, preservation of self or intellectual pleasures rather than social advancement are represented more favorably. The notable exceptions are Lawrence's works, which suggest that social advancement is the ambiguous "good" of literacy, while the introspection gained through hyper-literacy causes fragmentation of the self.

## Methodology

Eldred and Mortensen, in their article “Reading Literacy Narratives” published in *College English* (1992), call for the movement of literacy studies “in one important direction: into the study of literary texts” (512). While this study does not trace its origins to Eldred’s and Mortensen’s discussion of literacy theory and literary scholarship, both studies share the assumption that literacy theory has the potential to open new avenues in literary studies, and to enrich literacy studies in the same way that rhetorical criticism more broadly has influenced literary criticism. The present study differs from Eldred and Mortensen in methodology and approach, and importantly, in categories of analysis. Rather than demonstrating a text’s relationship to pre-determined categories—the “literacy myth” and “narratives of socialization,” which have Marxist critical overtones, “literature of the contact zone,” which draws from Postcolonial criticism, and “literacy narratives,” which resembles this study in that it approximates a genre approach (Eldred and Mortensen 512-513), the methodology of this study has been to isolate scenes in fictional works that portray literate acts and analyze them using literacy theory. By teasing out the scenes’ evocation of literacy theory in their portrayal of texts and the activities of reading and writing, it is possible to identify the works’ contribution to a historical intellectual discourse on the place of reading in society and the life of the individual. A key difference is that the current study does not seek merely to uncover the problems of literacy, but how the problems were perceived in the writers’ time and what uses of literacy are represented in the texts as essential to the function of the individual within society. Thus, I do not attempt to support or refute, for example,

Graff's identification of a literacy "myth," nor does this study use a method that is, by nature, a literate elitist method to argue that the transformative power of literacy or its social uses are vastly overstated. Rather, I strive elucidate an intellectual discourse on the dangers or benefits of advanced literacy and assess what this literary discourse on literacy might contribute to our understanding of literacy, literature, the relationship between the two, and how the relationship between literacy and literature reflects on the position of the author as literate elite. This study illustrates the application of literacy theories to literary texts rather than application of literary texts to literacy theory to reinforce some theories and refute others.

This study maintains that analysis of scenes of literate activity using literacy theory has the potential to contribute to literary studies as well as literacy theory. While its status as a relatively new critical approach to literature through a novel application of theory is evident, it is by analyzing a variety of texts that literacy theory will be enriched, as each new literary work analyzed may introduce to literacy theory previously unexplored contexts, uses, and consequences of literate activity. Literary texts dramatize literate situations and literacy-based interactions; it is the literary dramatizations—which are often interpretations of plausible real-world literacy events—that bring to light previously unexplored subjects for literacy theory. For example, Lawrence's portrayals of the literacy-based relationship between Miriam and Paul in *Sons and Lovers* and between Hilda and Syson in "Shades of Spring" suggest an unexplored topic in literacy studies—the influence of literacy on human intimacy. From Lawrence's texts, in which the literacy-intimacy connection is thematically significant to the work, it is then

possible to extend analysis to intimate literacy relationships in the works of Woolf and Forster. It may be the task of literacy theory in the future to theorize literacy and human relationships. Further, literary portrayals of literate activity refocus attention on the individual experience of literacy. While some literacy theorists do deal in case studies, frequently discussions of literacy focus on social class, abstractions, or types, and it remains for applications of literacy theory—applications of literacy theory to composition studies, for example—to theorize literacy as it exists in individual situations and contexts. Here, literary examples, while fictional, give an alternate venue for analysis of literacy on an individual level, though each of the texts in this study also illustrates societal and cultural aspects of literacy. In short, literary texts provide more or less plausible contexts for literate activities, with even the implausible representations—like those in *Brave New World* and “The Celestial Omnibus,” for example—suggesting perspectives on the benefits, effects, and uses of literacy.

The isolation of scenes of reading suggests multiple ways in which to discuss literacy within a text. One key approach used in this study is to assess how the representation of literacy adheres to or differs from the presumed or established characteristics of literacy according to literacy theorists, for example, to point out when the characteristics ascribed to texts by literacy theorists—its fixity, for example, as compared to speech—influence the plot or characters in significant ways. Literacy theory also lends itself well to the elucidation of implied pedagogies of reading in literary texts, as in Cuddy-Keane’s discussion of Woolf. This study examines characters’ interiorization of literacy or “level of literacy,” value judgments on literacy,

psychological implications of literacy, and situations in which individual literacy or literate aspirations are placed at odds with societal/cultural norms. It discusses societal regard for/use of literacy, seeking to distinguish between societal literacy and cultural literacy, a question raised through analysis of Huxley's *Brave New World*. Literacy theory proves useful for explaining the text's invocation of its own text-ness, what might be considered its meta-literate awareness. The scenes of literacy might, in future studies, be further divided and classified as literate "acts" vs. "situations" of reading. Unlike literacy theory, literature links literate acts—that is, portrayals of the reading process, reading reproduced—to literate "situations," which focus on context and what is occurring when the internal, individual act of reading occurs. Literate "acts," then, are scenes like the decoding of the skywriting in the opening scenes of *Mrs. Dalloway*, or Leonard Bast's experience of reading Ruskin. A literate "situation" can be analyzed along with a literate "act" when Bast's reading is interrupted by Jackie. Other specific contributions to literary theory offered by this study include expansion of the critical concept of Modernist anxiety, movement beyond the trope of the misunderstood artist or the designations "lowbrow," "highbrow," and "middlebrow" to address literature's anxiety about its dependence on literacy, and exploration of "literacy fiction" as a legitimate genre.

### **Literacy Fiction: Definition and Directions**

As part of their methodology, Eldred and Mortensen propose the identification in plots and sub-plots of "literacy narratives," which they define as stories that "foreground

issues of language and literacy” and “are structured by learned, internalized ‘literacy tropes’ (Brodkey 47), by ‘prefigured’ ideas and images (see White 1-23)” (531, 513). In practice, Eldred and Mortensen seek to identify the plots or sub-plots *as* “literacy narratives,” which may imply, rather than portray literacy, as in their analysis of *Pygmalion*, which concerns itself explicitly with change in *spoken* rather than written language in the life of the individual. While literacy is relevant to Shaw’s play, and while it is possible to approach the play according to literacy theory, to do so by assuming that language and education in general are thinly veiled metaphors for literacy opens the possibility that other texts might be misread through identification of “literacy tropes” that, in fact, do not exist in the text or are not used prominently during the time in which the text was produced. Their approach is both too limiting and too broad.

Literacy fiction, distinct from Eldred’s and Mortensen’s “literacy narrative,” may be defined as a work of fiction that prominently features scenes of literate activity that imply discourses on the nature or function of literate activity. These scenes may or may not be sufficiently organized into narrative form—whether plot or sub-plot—to fit into Eldred’s and Mortensen’s scheme. However, it is important that literate activity serve at least a thematic function, that scenes of literate activity be prominent and recurring, and that they be clearly identifiable as literate, text-based activities. Literacy fiction provides a complement to literacy theory by representing alternate theoretical perspectives on literacy without relegating literacy to a purely theoretical sphere. Further, unlike some literacy theories, literacy fiction does not designate literacy as a single “state of being.”

Literacy fiction has the potential to represent diverse communities of readers and their shared interactions, to represent different levels of literacy or literate ability, and to represent different aspects of literacy—literacy as in coding and decoding language, for example, or access to ideas. Literacy fictions may prominently feature the education or the situation of particular readers, and ask theoretical questions of literacy, such as what characterizes an ideal reader, why readers read, and to what purpose readers put texts. Through literacy fiction, writers critique the literacy practices of their readers, model literacy for their readers, or respond to trends of literacy within society or culture and intersections of politics and literacy. As such, literacy fictions often represent the theories of the literate elite about individual or mass literacy, and offer a privileged perspective on literate acts. Recommendations that literacy be restricted, or that literacy be kept “pure,” untainted by utilitarian purposes, or observations that literacy is not useful for certain classes of individuals, should be considered with an eye to the elite position of the writer who propounds these theories. In literacy fiction, however, unlike literacy theory, there is the possibility that a “recommendation” about literacy based on plot events demonstrates a critique of the contexts that create the situation—it is unlikely, for example, that *Howards End* espouses an end to working class autodidacticism. The ambiguities of the literary text add interest for reader and critic seeking to understand the nature of literacy in the human life-world.

Literacy fiction emerges most commonly in literary eras that are self-conscious about literacy, perhaps influenced by changes in literacy on a societal level, as in the case of Shakespeare or Cervantes. Since the rise of mass literacy in the nineteenth



century, the societies of Britain and the United States in particular have been hyper-conscious of issues related to reading in public life. In the early twentieth century, Modernist literacy fiction expresses Modernist anxiety about the reader's level of literacy and uses of literacy, and the effects of literacy on the reader in response to changes in the audience for literary works. Modernist literacy fiction responds to these concerns by guiding the reader—not unambiguously—toward specific perceptions of literacy. Though “literacy fiction” refers specifically to works of fiction, as represented in this study, future studies might identify “literacy fictions” among drama and poetry. Notably, as Eldred's and Mortensen's analysis suggests, Shaw's *Pygmalion* might be analyzed according to the conventions of the current literacy-based methodology, and the poetry of fellow Modernists T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, among others, might be considered for theories of literacy implied by their subject matter and textual representation of spoken and written language. Additionally, this study does not exhaust the range of possible discussions of literacy in Modernist fiction, which may be extended to a discussion of the Modernist meta-textual aesthetic as well as expanded to include the works of Joyce and other Modernist writers.

As literacy has remained a relevant topic in politics and popular culture, literacy fiction has continued to develop. It develops prominently throughout the twentieth century in works of dystopian science fiction—descending in direct lineage from Huxley's *Brave New World*. Included in these dystopian literacy fictions are such works as Orwell's *1984* and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*; Bradbury's work in particular requires critical reevaluation according to literacy theory since the author's 2007 statement that

his *Fahrenheit 451* was a novel about the effect of television on reading rather than a novel about censorship.<sup>59</sup> A contrasting development of literacy fiction is easily identifiable in works of contemporary realist fiction such as Ernest Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*, with its specifically American emphasis on the relationship between race politics and literate or illiterate identity that may be traced to autobiographies and slave narratives of the nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup> Further studies of literacy fictions should consider dramatic works such as Brian Friel's *Translations*. Literacy theory might also enrich film studies in interesting ways, as numerous films—some of which, like *Educating Rita*, are film adaptations of stage drama—take as their subject themes related to the acquisition and uses of literacy, often in unusual ways.<sup>61</sup>

In this dissertation, literacy theory and literature are in dialogue. The theories of McLuhan and Ong are particularly well-suited to a discussion of Modernist texts, since their theories reflect the concepts of literacy held by Modernist writers themselves. This dissertation establishes a method for reading literature according to the literacy theories appropriate to the early twentieth-century works discussed. Future studies in general might adopt the method of isolating scenes of literate activity for analysis according to appropriate literacy theories. Contextualized according to the groundwork laid by this

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<sup>59</sup> See Amy E. Boyle Johnston. "Ray Bradbury: *Fahrenheit 451* Misinterpreted." See also "Bradbury on Censorship/Television."

<sup>60</sup> See M. Jimmie Killingsworth. *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric*. Ch. 8

<sup>61</sup> Consider, for example, the films of Pedro Almodovar, which stress overall the potential of literate activity to liberate one's identity, frequently representing the identity-forming potential of literacy in terms of gender performativity. *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, *La Ley del deseo*, *Entre tinieblas*, and *Todo sobre mi madre* contain significant scenes of writers writing. *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* and *La Flor de mi secreto* center prominently on literacy themes.

dissertation, future studies of early twentieth-century literature might analyze the Modernists' attention to language, self-conscious use of language to express the nuances of thought and human consciousness, Modernist publication choices and constraints, and Modernist nonfiction, in particular the Modernist "reading lesson," seeking further correspondences between Modernist works and theories of reading and writing and their affect on the human psyche. This dissertation deals explicitly with fiction—the novel and short story. However, "scenes" of literate activity may be found in poetry and drama, or even the visual arts, which should provide exciting opportunities for analysis. Other methodologies to which this study merely alludes, such as feminist theory, might articulate nuanced versions of Modernist anxiety as it intersects with literacy theory.

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## VITA

Nicole Mara DuPlessis is originally from New Orleans, LA, where she received her Bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans in 1997. She earned her Master of Arts in English from Texas A&M University in December 2001 with a thesis entitled *(Super)Natural Worlds: Environmental Harmony and Societal Perfection in the Chronicles of Narnia*. In August 2008, she completed her Doctorate in English, also at Texas A&M University. Her dissertation is *Literacy and Its Discontents: Modernist Anxiety and the Literacy Fiction of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley*. Her research interests include early twentieth century British literature, science fiction, fantasy, and gothic literature, children's literature, and applications of literacy theory to literature. She is interested in representations of the Catholic faith and worldview in literature, and would like to investigate how one might define "sacramental" literature, and whether a "Catholic postmodernism" exists in literature.

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